







# THE BRAHMA SAMAJ

( A SHORT HISTORY )

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BY

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**ORIENTAL CHRIST HOUSE,**

*Rajkot, Kathiawad.*

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**Board Rs. 3.]**

**[Cloth Rs. 4.**

**1929**

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

BL 1235  
P2

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Printed by R. R. Bakhale at the Bombay Vaibhav Press, Servants  
of India Society's Home, Sandhurst Road, Girgaon, Bombay.

AND

Published by Manilal C. Parekh, B. A.,  
Rajkot, Kathiawad.

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*Div.*

To  
That Inter-communal and Inter-religious Fellowship  
Which is the proper crown of New Hindustan  
and  
to  
That Fellowship of Reconciliation  
between  
Race and Race  
and  
Religion and Religion,  
for the promotion of which the Noblest men and women  
of all lands  
are praying and working,  
this Short History  
of  
a Movement which affords one of the brightest examples  
of such Fellowship,  
is lovingly inscribed.



## PREFACE

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In the course of Human History, the East and the West have met again and again. The classic example of their meeting is in Christianity which, being originally a religion of the Orient, has found its home in the West. As a matter of fact, the best in History and in Human Nature transcends the limitations of time and space, and in so far as it is inspired by Providence it is much the same everywhere. This is the only way in which many of the great parallelisms of thought and feeling and even of language to be found in various religions and systems of philosophy of the world can be accounted for. Besides there are certain times when there are currents of thought and inspiration, hidden from ordinary view, working and giving rise to great men simultaneously in various parts of the world, all doing the same kind of work more or less without being affected or influenced by one another or even so much as knowing about each other. There is something very mysterious and wonderful in the fact that there should have appeared at about the same time such men as Mahavir and Buddha in Hindustan, Confucius in China and Socrates in distant Greece. The same kind of phenomenon was seen perhaps to a much larger extent in the medieval times when saints and teachers of pure and mystical religion arose by the score simultaneously all over the world and led the whole of Humanity a stage further. Something very similar, though on a smaller scale, appeared in the nineteenth century, and great men and movements arose in various parts of the world. Among these men Bab



and Baha Ullah in Persia, Cardinal Newman and General Booth in England, Count Leo Tolstoy in Russia, Emerson in America and Ram Mohan and Keshub in Hindustan are some of the most prominent. Of the religious movements of this period the most important are the Bahai Movement and the Brahma Samaj. Not only do both these claim to be divinely inspired but they have had a succession of great teachers as has not been seen in any other movement of our times.

Of these two, the Brahma Samaj is decidedly much more international and inter-religious. It has been the meeting-ground of the best in the East and the West. Its contribution to the solution of the problem of the "Reconciliation of Races and Religions," the great problem of the present age and the future, has been immense. It is the finest fruit of the "British Connection with India." In it have met and mingled the finest streams of thought and feeling of both Hinduism and Christianity, themselves the best representatives respectively of the Aryan and Jewish Cultures, the only two predominantly religious Cultures of the world. This is not mere Eclecticism, for there was behind it an intense search after the Universal Truth in both these Religions. The life and work of the three great Brahma leaders-Rajarshi Ram Mohan, Maharshi Devendranath and Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder—were inspired by a great passion for Truth, and much of the History of the Brahma Samaj has centred round their work. Thus while the Brahma Samaj assumed inevitably the form of a religious reform movement in its relation to Hinduism, its relation to Christianity also was of a similar character.

In this connection these words of Dr. George Howells, Principal of the Serampore College, are well worth noting\* :

He ( Ram Mohan Roy ) did pioneer work in compelling Christian thinkers and missionary teachers to go back to Jesus for the fundamentals of their theology, and to review once again in the light of spiritual experience and in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom, characteristic Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity in its relation to the Unity of God, the Atonement, the Incarnation and the significance of the miraculous.

These words are true of Keshub Chunder Sen to a still larger extent.

But the Brahma leaders were not mere religious revivalists or reformers of either Hinduism or of Christianity. They were original teachers and it is to their lasting glory, especially of the first and the last, that they have brought Hinduism and Christianity closer. This is veritably a New Dispensation of God and in this the Brahma Samaj has a ministry for the whole world. There is no greater mission than this awaiting fulfilment at the hands of the Hindu Church of Christ, the only Church of Christ in Hindustan, that is slowly but none the less steadily rising in the land both among the so-called Christians and non-Christians, and in this it may perhaps be the legitimate descendant of the Brahma Samaj. This is a work that has just begun and it will require ages and many movements before it comes to full fruition.

It is not only of such movements-international and inter-religious-that the Brahma Samaj has been a pioneer.

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\* An address delivered at the Brahma Samaj Centenary, 1928.

It has been the pioneer of all the national religious and social reform movements in the land. For full fifty years it bore all the brunt of such a one, suffering persecutions and great hardships in the pursuit of truth before the next one, the Arya Samaj, came into existence. It prepared the ground for others and helped perhaps more than any other single reform or revivalistic movement in the creation of that national consciousness which is seen surging in the heart of the country to-day. Difficult as it may appear even to the Brahmas to understand, the Hindu Sangathan movement is as closely related to the Brahma Samaj as to the Arya Samaj. The immediate cause of the Brahma Samaj was the proselytising activities of Christian Missions in which Ram Mohan Roy saw a real danger to the unity of national life similar to what Islam had been in the past. Both these religions, Christianity and Mohammedanism, came in the wake of foreign rule and imperialisms, and Ram Mohan rightly felt that the spread of these religions\* in the country under the circumstances would be only to make the conquest of this country complete by making it a cultural one. It was to provide against this danger arising from a new and powerful divisive force that he deliberately took a step backward and thus the Brahma Samaj came into existence. Thus this Samaj started as a movement of Hindu *Swadharmagraha*. In course of time it became, thanks to the religious genius of Devendra and Keshub, both deeper and broader, and in its last

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\* He had an intimate knowledge of both these. He owed his first inspiration and impulse for reform to Islam and he believed Unitarian Christianity to be the highest form of Truth known to mankind.

stage, viz., the New Dispensation, attained to a kind of harmony of Hinduism and Christianity. In all this the Brahma Samaj has many things in common with Sikhism which did the same kind of work when faced with Islam only three centuries back. Ram Mohan and Keshub are the legitimate successors of Nanak and Kabir, and in them the New Hindustan has its noblest Prophets and *Acharyas*.

It is not meant to say here that the Brahma Samaj is perfect. Far from it. The leaders of the Samaj have said again and again that it is far from so. It has many limitations and weaknesses. The fundamental defect in it is the lack of a definite religious objective. It has been too subjective all along. Its religious life is largely empiric in its character. The leaders themselves have been far from united in their beliefs and principles, and the rank and file are still less so. To a very large extent the belief of the Brahma Samaj regarding Revelation or Scripture or Prophets etc. has been too general to have any particular significance, and consequently it is vague and nebulous. Most of the weaknesses of the Brahma Samaj arise from this subjective character of its religion. All this was inevitable because the Brahma Samaj is neither a sect of any of the known religions nor a new religion by itself. It is a movement of the Hindu mind and genius towards something larger and deeper which is nothing but the synthesis of the best in Hinduism and Christianity and the harmony of the finest things in the East and the West. The Brahma Samaj is a link between these and therein lies all its greatness, strength and value.

It is of such a movement that the present writer has tried to give a record in the following pages. It has

been a labour of love with him for he has given some of the best years of his life to the service of this body. These were years rich in personal purity and inspiration through communion with God and fellowship with His children, a period full of real happiness and joy. Although no more in active fellowship with it, he still considers himself a part—a spiritual child—of the Brahma Samaj, and it is as such that he has written this book. Although he has tried to be as faithful to facts as possible in the writing of it, the account given is bound to be coloured by his own ways of thinking and views of men and things. This is inevitable except in books relating to exact sciences. Perhaps it is most so in biographies and histories and that constitutes very often the charm of these books. Every book of this kind, worthy of the name, is an interpretation of a certain set of facts from the author's point of view, and the present work needs no apology on that account. Nevertheless the author is fully conscious of its many imperfections, especially of many an omission, inevitable in such a short history of so big a movement, of men and things, that ought to have found their place in the book. He can only plead his helplessness in the matter and he feels sure that the public, both Brahma and non-Brahma, will extend to him that charity which it always does in such cases.

The writer must acknowledge his deep debt of thanks to Dr. L. P. Larsen, for his great kindness in going through the MS. of the book and giving some very valuable suggestions which he has tried to embody in the book.

Rajkot—Kathiawad }  
23rd February 1929. }

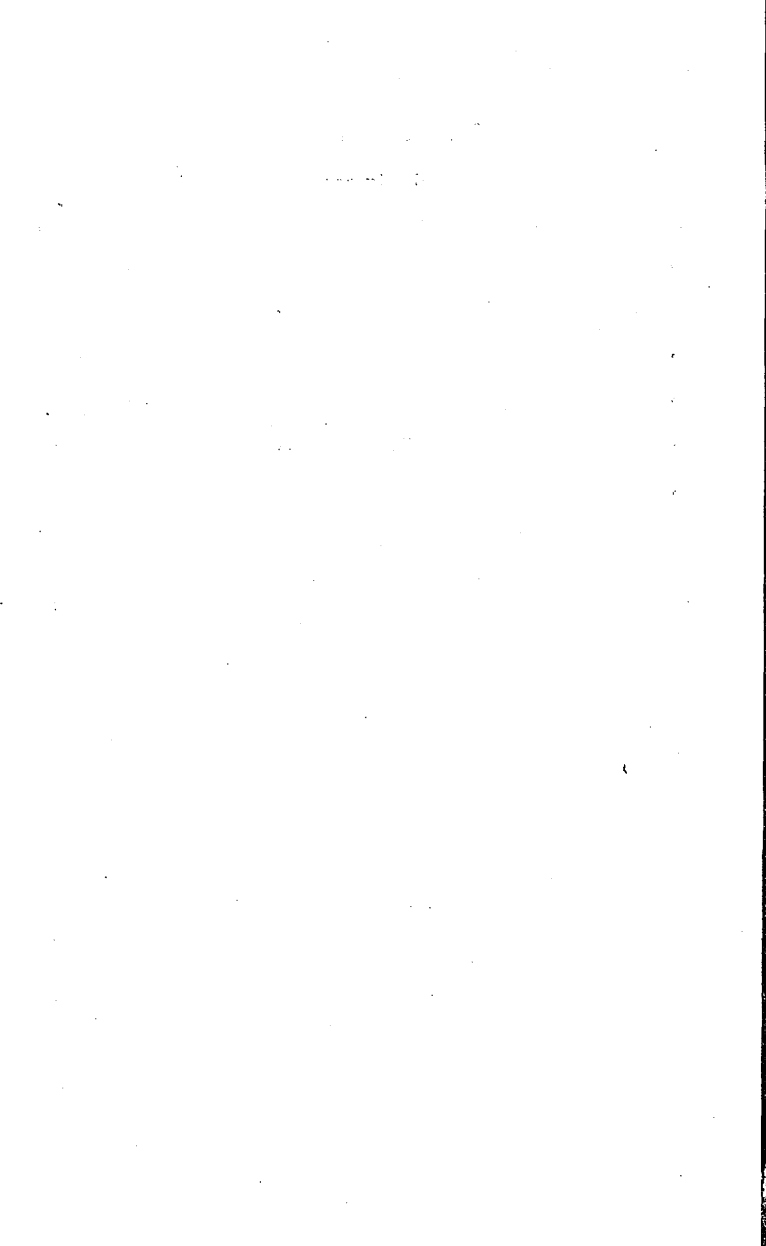
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## CHAPTER I

### THE BRAHMA SABHA

On a fateful evening, so a well-authenticated story runs, while returning from a place of Unitarian Christian worship, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was asked by one of his disciples why they should not start a spiritual worship of God in their own national way rather than attend such a place of worship. The suggestion, thus unceremoniously thrown out on a road-side, may well have given expression to the feelings of most of those who attended the Unitarian worship including Ram Mohan himself. Hence, it was no wonder if it gave a distinct turn to the many tentative efforts of Ram Mohan to establish the spiritual worship of God in Hindustan. Another influence that was at work in the establishment of such indigenous worship was Mr. Adam, the Unitarian preacher, who was converted from Trinitarianism to Unitarianism by Ram Mohan himself. Seeing that Unitarianism failed to take root and evoke sufficient enthusiasm, he was anxious to start an Association auxiliary to the one called the British India Unitarian Association for which he was working. As a result of these suggestions and plans of Ram Mohan's friends and followers, there came into existence the Brahma Samaj or the Brahma Sabha, the Association of the worshippers of Brahma, as it was called at its inception.

This Brahma Sabha, though it may have owed its birth to some such immediate cause as the suggestion



mentioned above or to the proposals of men like Mr. Adam, was the ripe fruit of Ram Mohan's own manifold activities in the spread of Monotheism extending over years. He was its chief parent. It was the crowning-point of all his efforts to ameliorate the condition of his countrymen in a variety of ways, and was the fitting consummation to his career and work above all as a religious reformer. The various associations and societies which he had started during the course of many years in the past in order to propagate the knowledge of Spirit—God found their full development in this Brahma Sabha. By his translation and publication of the Upanishads in both English and Bengali, by his many controversies with the orthodox defenders of the Brahmanical religion and by his personal influence over many like-minded men, he had prepared the ground for such an institution to come to birth and take root.

This Brahma Sabha, though it was a lineal descendant of several indigenous associations, was the immediate heir of the Unitarian Association of Calcutta and it was literally built on its ruins. The relationship which thus came to be established between the Brahma Samaj and Unitarianism at its very birth has been kept up all these years with but slight variations, and the Unitarians of both England and America have not only sympathised with the Brahma Samaj in general but even helped its cause in one way or another. In fact, both these movements, the Brahma Samaj and Unitarian Christianity, owe their origin to the same causes, have run a similar course and are alike in their influence and consequences, both positive and negative.

The formal establishment of the Brahma Sabha took place on the 20th of August, 1828. At first its weekly divine service was held on Saturday evenings, but later on this practice was discontinued in favour of Sunday which has been found more convenient owing to its being a general holiday. The order of service as it was in the beginning has been thus described by Mr. Adam:

The service begins with two or three of the Pundits singing or rather chanting in the cathedral style, some of the spiritual portions of the Veda, which are next explained in the vernacular dialect to the people by another Pundit. This is followed by a discourse in Bengali.....and the whole is concluded by hymns both in Sanskrit and Bengali, sung with the voice and accompanied by instrumental music, which is also occasionally interposed between other parts of the service. The audience consisted generally of from 50 to 60 individuals, several Pundits, a good many Brahmins and all decent and attentive in their demeanour.

A special feature of this divine service was that there was a room within room, a *sanctum sanctorum* where sat the officiating minister, who read the Vedas and delivered his sermon. Evidently this was due to the wish of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his co-workers not to violate the prevailing belief and sentiment of the people that the Vedas should not be brought before the vulgar gaze. Another noticeable feature of the service was that it was the Brahmins alone who could recite the Vedas in the inner sanctuary, and two Telugu\* Brahmins

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\* Brahmins of the South have been known for their greater Sanskrit lore for centuries past. Possibly under the Moslem rulers the North lost much of its Sanskrit learning while the South preserved it.

were engaged solely for this purpose. Thus the worship of the Brahma Sabha in the beginning was Vedic or Vedantic in its character and its ministers were Brahmins only. Perhaps the only new element introduced into it was in the shape of hymns that were interposed between the recitals, exposition and discourse. It is quite likely that this was in imitation of the Unitarian worship. Besides, although this worship was based on the Vedas and the Brahmins were the sole ministers thereof, the entire idea and mode of it was borrowed from Unitarianism, there being no precedent for such Vedic worship at least for centuries. The newness of it consisted in its congregational character and also in its being without any image or symbol or sacrifice. Thus the Brahma Samaj is indebted through its founder for the very idea and mode of its worship to both Christianity and Mohammedanism, to which last Ram Mohan owed his first awakening to the merits of Monotheism and his life-long iconoclastic antagonism to idolatry.

The creed of the Brahma Sabha was Vedic Monotheism with the bare recognition of Vedas as its Scripture of acknowledged authority, though without any authoritative interpretation thereon. It seems as if this too were an unconscious imitation of Protestant Christianity and Islam, both of which recognise the supreme necessity of a Scripture while allowing private judgement for its interpretation. The acknowledgement of the Vedas as the Scripture of the Brahma Samaj was largely a matter of convention and with a view to utility however highly the term might be understood.

Ram Mohan Roy has been often blamed for this compromise as it is called on his part and hence it would be of interest to know what it is exactly that he did.

Ram Mohan's personal faith was larger and deeper than what was represented by the creed of the Brahma Sabha. Like many a great man, he was bigger than this creation of his. He was indeed a Vedantin, a believer in Vedic Theism but he was much more. His faith came nearest to Unitarian Christianity, if it was not that altogether. As early as 1820, he had published a book called "The Precepts of Jesus" and in it he had brought together all the moral and spiritual teachings of Jesus Christ from the four Gospels. In his Preface to this book he says :

A notion of the existence of a supreme superintending power, the Author and Preserver of this harmonious system, who has organised and who regulates such an infinity of celestial and terrestrial objects, and a due estimation of that law which teaches that man should do unto others as he would wish them to do unto him, reconcile us to human nature, and tend to render our existence agreeable to ourselves and profitable to the rest of mankind. The former of these sources of satisfaction, viz. a belief in God, prevails generally, being derived either from tradition and instruction, or from an attentive survey of the wonderful skill and contrivance displayed in the works of nature. *The latter, although it is partially taught also in every system of religion with which I am acquainted, is principally inculcated in Christianity.* (The italics are of the present writer.)

He says again :

This simple code of religion is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of God, who has equally submitted all living creatures, without distinction of caste, rank or wealth, to change, disappointment, pain and death, and has equally admitted all to be partakers of the

bountiful mercies which he has lavished over nature, and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to themselves and to society, that I can not but hope the best effects from its promulgation in its present form.

Many more extracts can be quoted from the writings of Ram Mohan Roy to show still more definitely that his faith was not far removed from Unitarian Christianity. He even started a Unitarian Mission and did all he could to advance its cause. Why was it, then, that he fell back from his religious position in order to found the Brahma Sabha on the basis of the Vedas? The reason for this is not far to seek. During the course of the last eighteen centuries Christianity had come to be identified with Western Civilization, and what was worse it came to Hindustan as the religion of its conquerors much in the same way as Mohammedanism had done. Under these circumstances it was impossible that Christianity of the genuine kind, whether Trinitarian or Unitarian, should have a fair chance to spread.\*

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\* The only big experiment made to spread pure Christianity without proselytising was made by Robert de Nobili and his followers and their work came to an end as soon as the British and the French betrayed Christianity by fighting with one another in a most unchristian manner. Abbé Du Bois says in the Preface to his book, *Hindu Customs and Manners*:—"The Hindus soon found that these missionaries whom their colour, their talents and other qualities had induced them to regard as such extraordinary beings as men coming from another world, were in fact nothing else but disguised Feringis (Europeans) and that their country, their religion and original education were the same as those of the evil, the contemptible Feringis who had of late invaded their country. This event proved the last blow to the interests of the Christian religion. No more conversions were made. Apostasy became almost general in several quarters and Christianity became more and more an object of contempt and aversion in proportion as European manners became better known to the Hindus."

This work has been extremely difficult all along but it was much more so at the time of Ram Mohan Roy. Then the national consciousness of the people had not risen sufficiently high, nor was it easy for the popular mind to separate the genuine coin of Christianity from the base metal of extraneous matter such as culture or civilization or imperialism alloyed with which it came into the land. It was because of this that Ram Mohan Roy retraced back a step and took his stand on the National Scripture. But he did this with a spirit of tolerance and catholicity all his own, and it is these qualities that have made his movement one of the very greatest in modern times. The Brahma Samaj has raised the national mind as perhaps no other single movement or agency has done; it has helped in removing the barriers raised in the name of religion by one sect or religion against another as few religious movements have done; and moreover it has by this preparatory work made the acquisition of Truth easier for all. Thus the movement that was thus started has been amply blessed by God and therein lies its justification.

In its social aspects the Brahma Sabha at this early stage did not claim to be a new community. True to its name, it was only a Sabha, an Association of those who believed in Brahma, the Spirit—God, and met once a week for His worship. Except for a few who were personal friends and followers of Ram Mohan, the tie between the various members was of the slenderest kind, and the moment the personal weight and influence of the great leader was gone, the members of the Sabha

melted away like mist. Most of these claimed to be reformers all round, but their reforming activities in the social sphere did not go beyond the advocacy of the abolition of Suttee, and in a few cases a certain amount of liberty or rather licence taken in secret in matters of eating and drinking with people of other castes and creeds. It was too early for the question of intermarriage to become one of practical social reform, and even the best of them including Ram Mohan himself were too careful to do anything which might involve open break with their castes.

Now that the Brahma Sabha was no exotic plant like the Unitarian Association but an indigenous institution, a *Swadeshi* affair, it did make a greater appeal to the educated people of Calcutta. Its meetings were attended in larger numbers than those of the other, and people even subscribed to the funds of the Sabha. The next important step that Ram Mohan took was to provide it with a place of its own for worship. A suitable site on Chitpore Road was bought for the purpose and a building was erected thereupon. This was formally opened on the 23rd of January, 1830, a day which has been since observed among the Brahmas in Calcutta as the principal day of their yearly festival and is celebrated in several other Samajes also.

This provision for what may now be called a *Mandir*, though it was not called such by Ram Mohan owing to the idolatrous associations connected with the word, was an act of much forethought and solicitude on the part of the founder. For, in many a place in the

land the Brahma Samaj has been kept going chiefly because there is a *Mandir* where the weekly service must be conducted, and it is doubtful if this very Sabha, the parent of all the others, would have lived but for this 'local habitation and a name.' Ram Mohan Roy left the country very soon after the performance of this opening ceremony, and during the years that followed his departure to and death in England it was largely due to the place that the fire was kept burning. It is of interest to note that only six days before this place was formally opened, the orthodox section of the Hindus organised a *Dharma Sabha* with large funds with the evident object of protecting the Sanatana Dharma. Ram Mohan Roy's work of social and religious reform had already aroused much antagonism against him and this was the first organised expression of it on a scale large enough to attract attention. Though it did not live long, it deserves mention as one of the first of those Societies and Sabhas which have now swelled to national proportions and have embodied in them many of those reforms for which Ram Mohan laboured and suffered.

We can have a definite idea of the Brahma Sabha as it was in the mind of its author from the Trust-deed of this place. It is a remarkable document, and shows much breadth of mind and catholicity of spirit which were unique in those days of sectarian and religious exclusion and hatred. In regard to the use of the building, it says that the Trustees shall allow it to be used,

as and for a place of Public Meeting, of all sorts and descriptions of people, without distinction, as shall behave and



conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious and devout manner for the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe but not under or by any other name, designation or title peculiarly used for and applied to any particular Being, or Beings by any man or set of men whatsoever :

and that no graven image, statue or sculpture, carving, painting, picture, portrait or the likeness of any thing shall be admitted within the building.....and that no sacrifice, offering or oblation of any kind or thing shall ever be permitted therein and that no animal or living creature shall, within the said building.....be deprived of life, either for religious purpose or for food :

and that no eating or drinking (except such as shall be necessary, by any accident, for the preservation of life), feasting or rioting be permitted therein or thereon :

and that, in conducting the said worship or adoration, no object, animate or inanimate, that has been, or shall hereafter become, or be recognised, as an object of worship, by any man or set of men, shall be reviled, or slightly or contemptuously spoken of or alluded to, either in preaching, praying or in the hymns, or other mode of worship that may be delivered or used in the said building :

and that no sermon, preaching, discourse, prayer or hymn be delivered, made or used in such worship, but such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds :

and also that a person of good repute and well known for his knowledge, piety and morality be employed by the said Trustees.....as a resident superintendent, and for the purpose

of superintending the worship so to be performed as is hereinbefore stated or expressed and that such worship be performed daily or at least as often as once in seven days.

There is very little to record of the life of this Brahma Sabha during the course of the next few years. It dragged on its weary existence till the time when Devendranath Tagore joined it and gave it a new lease of life. That it should have survived at all shows that its foundations were sunk deep into the needs of the age and the purpose of Providence.

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## CHAPTER II

## RAJARSHI RAM MOHAN ROY

Inasmuch as the history of the Brahma Samaj is inextricably woven into the life-history of its leaders, it is necessary to give some account of their life in the book. It has been the good fortune of this movement to have more eminent men as its leaders than any other in our times. This is true especially of its three great leaders, Rajarshi Ram Mohan Roy, Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and Brahmarshi Keshub Chandra Sen. There have been many others attached to the Samaj who have been remarkable in many ways, but these three are its most representative men. The religion of the Samaj has been exemplified in them as in none else, or rather the movement is their creation. Hence to know something of their life is to know something of the deep springs from which the Samaj derived its strength and inspiration. Moreover these men are amongst the foremost makers of the New Hindustan, especially the first and the third, and that gives an added interest to the story of their life, however briefly it might be related.

Ram Mohan was born of a Brahmin family in Radhanagar in Bengal, in or about the year 1772. His father's family was *Vaishnava* in its faith while that of his mother was *Shakta*. Perhaps this was not without its influence on the character of Ram Mohan in whom we find some of the characteristics belonging to both these sects. After doing some preliminary study at home, he was sent to Patna for the prosecution of his regular studies in Persian and Arabic. This was considered a necessary

qualification for employment in the service of the Moslem rulers of Bengal, in which some of the members of Ram Mohan's family had been engaged for some generations past. It was here that Ram Mohan made the most of his opportunities, learning many a science and art. He learnt rudiments of Aristotelian philosophy, became enamoured of Hafiz the Sufi poet, and got his eyes opened by the study of Islamic theology and possibly the Koran also. It is worth noticing that this great Hindu reformer derived his first impulse for the work of his life from what he came to know of Islam in his early youth. He is said to have written at this stage of his life something against idolatry which gave so much offence to his father that he had to leave home for some years. It is said that during this time he went as far as Tibet where also he came in serious conflict with the people owing to his criticism of their gross idolatry.

The next stage of his life began with a serious study in Benares of Sanskrit literature and the Brahmanical Scriptures. He is said to have passed some years in this study at the end of which he was more than ever confirmed in the belief that Monotheism was the only true form of faith and that idolatry was false. He found the Vedas also supporting him in this belief. Meantime his father died in 1803 and he settled in Murshidabad. It was here that he published his first work in Persian with a Preface in Arabic. The book is called "A gift to Deists," and therein he makes an attempt in abstract to show that the essence of all religions lies in what they all agree in, whereas their differences with one another are only the productions and impositions of superstition.

and priestcraft. What is thus maintained as the essence of religion is but a bare, colourless Deism which can inspire no love or enthusiasm in any human being. This book was to be followed by another entitled "Discussions on Various Religions," in which he was to give concrete examples of the theory he had propounded in the first. It is not known whether it was ever written. As for the first book, it was translated into English as late as 1884, but it has had hardly any influence whether in the original or in the translation. Altogether the book was an immature attempt on his part.

What may be called the third stage of his life began with his study of the English language. He entered into the service of the East India Company and in it he very soon rose to be the Dewan which meant "the principal native officer in the collection of revenues." While in this service, he attained much proficiency in the English language and learnt a great deal about contemporary politics all the world over. Indeed, a new world was opened to his sight and he could not but contrast it with what he had been so far familiar with. The ideas of Progress and Democracy became watch-words with him as with so many in the West : to him they came even with the force of a divine dispensation. Those were the days of Napoleon Bonaparte, and though Ram Mohan was an admirer of his great military genius, his sympathies lay with the forces making for Liberty and Equality. Those were the days when all intelligent people were bound to take one side or the other, and who would say that Ram Mohan's was the wrong choice ? Already his intellectual position attained

altogether independently was very similar to that of the French Deists and Illuminists who had prepared the ground for the French Revolution, and hence it is no wonder if, when he saw these ideas working in the shape of large movements, he should have grown very enthusiastic about them. His acquaintance with the British people, their ways and their institutions made him more favourable to the British rule than before, and he began to look upon it as a sort of Providential arrangement for the uplift of Hindustan. The British officers who came to know him intimately could not but have much regard for his sterling character, his learning and high ideals. In about a decade Ram Mohan retired from service with a fortune sufficiently large to maintain him all his life.

It was in 1814 that Ram Mohan came and settled down in Calcutta. Hindustan then was at the parting of ways and there was none more fitted to show it the right direction. Indeed, there have been few men since who have had the same understanding of various civilisations and cultures and breadth of outlook. One of the first things that Ram Mohan did was to publish some of the Upanishads and Vedant Sutra in Bengali. His main interest was religion and he had the same zeal for religious reform that he had shown in his earlier days: only it had been mellowed with age and experience. Moreover he wanted to do constructive work and so presented the people with the best of their Scriptures in their own language. This in itself was an innovation. Besides he did this to enforce the truth of Monotheism and the falsehood of idolatry. Naturally this roused

intense opposition against him and some of his own relations even deserted him for such a heresy on his part. Undaunted by these things, he went on with his work and even started a sort of fellowship called *Atmiya Sabha* of like-minded men for the cultivation of spiritual life in accordance with the truths of the Upanishads and the Vedant Sutra. The beginning of the Brahma Sabha may well be traced to this tentative attempt at organising a Fellowship.

Ram Mohan's religion was not one of withdrawal from the world. It was social in the best sense of the term and probably this also was a lesson that he had learnt from his early Moslem education. It may well be that it was in Patna that he came to possess an intense hatred for the custom of Suttee. A little later his sister-in-law became a Suttee and this is said to have opened his eyes to the extreme wickedness of the practice. It was a problem crying for solution. The number of Suttees was on the increase rather than otherwise. In Calcutta and near about it no less than four hundred women were burnt to death every year. It was nonsense, if not sheer hypocrisy, to say that these died voluntarily. The social conscience of the people had been blunted to the point of wickedness, and interested parties took advantage of the custom to get young widows burn themselves to death in this manner. Moslem rulers and especially Akbar had forbidden the practice in the past, but with the decline of Moslem power it had reasserted itself. The evil was at its worst in Bengal where the British East India Company had just established its power. It was then too feeble as well as indifferent to

put it down by force as it should have. It needed a William Bentinck to do it. Meantime on the Hindu side Ram Mohan Roy did all he could to awaken public opinion against it, and it is to him as much as to Bentinck that the credit for the abolition of this most inhuman custom in Hindustan belongs.

Another problem that Ram Mohan took seriously in hand was to spread general enlightenment among people. He started papers in Bengali, in Persian which was then the court language and in English. These were the first periodicals started by the people of the land. One of the characteristics, worthy of notice, of these papers was that they stood against oppression not only in this land but in any land and among any people of the world. Ram Mohan's heart was large enough to feel the woes and joys of even distant people like the Irish or the Spanish almost as much as those of his own people. When the Spanish people got a constitution, he gave a public dinner at the Town Hall of Calcutta. When the people of Naples were crushed back into servitude by the Austrians, Ram Mohan was deeply dejected. One of the signal services he rendered in this direction was by his powerful plea for the liberty of the Press in the land, and he prepared a memorandum which has been regarded by some as "the Areopagitica of Indian history" on account of its diction and argument.

Ram Mohan was a pioneer in the field of education also. He had known intimately the advantages and disadvantages of both the Hindu and Moslem systems of education. He had also known something of the Western system in which science and modern knowledge



were finding an increasing place. He unhesitatingly preferred this to the other. / In the controversy then raging between the Orientalists and the Occidentalists in regard to the system of education to be introduced into Hindustan, Ram Mohan gave his support to the latter and his advocacy meant much for their cause. / It is probably only next to Macaulay that we owe him our present system of English education which, in spite of all its disadvantages, has done much to unify the country and bring it to its present level. Moreover he was not satisfied with dealing with the problem only theoretically but he started schools of his own and did everything to promote such education. Thus he fought and worked for reform in all directions, reform in government of the people, in education, in social life and last but not least in the field of religion.

While carrying on all these activities for the amelioration of the people, Ram Mohan was not unmindful of the main work of his life. The work of translation and publication of the Upanishads was carried on all the time. Besides, he was engaged in several controversies with the defenders of Hinduism and in the course of these he wrote several books in Bengali. He was also engaged in making a serious study of Christianity. As early as 1817, he wrote to a friend in England that he "had found the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and more adapted for the use of rational beings, than any other which have come to my knowledge." In 1820, he published his "Precepts of Jesus", recommending these to his countrymen as "the Guide to Peace and Happiness." This book should have

found warm welcome from the missionaries the chief of whom in the land were Carey and Marshman, but they attacked it severely and called its compiler a 'heathen'. Thus Ram Mohan was forced to enter into a controversy with them which lasted several years. In the course of it he wrote three "Appeals to the Christian Public" in which he viewed the Christian religion from various points of view. He even studied Hebrew in order that he may know the Old Testament in the original. His own religious position he definitely avowed to be that of Unitarian Christianity.

He was also engaged in the work of translating the Gospels into Bengali. He was assisted in this work by the members of the Mission which Carey had started. Unfortunately this work could not go on as there was disagreement between them in regard to the translation of some of the terms in the fourth Gospel. However, one of the results of their discussions was the change in the religious views of one of them, Mr. Adam. He accepted Unitarianism and began working with Ram Mohan Roy from the year 1821. This embittered the controversy with the missionaries which had just begun. Ram Mohan had also to enter into another controversy with them as they attacked Hinduism in a most violent manner. A Unitarian Committee was started in the same year with Mr. Adam as a kind of missionary, and some of Ram Mohan's friends were even members of this new body. They began to hold a regular divine service with Mr. Adam as the minister. In course of time they came to have an Anglo-Hindu school and a press attached to this mission. Ram Mohan entered

into correspondence with some of the leading Unitarians of both England and America, and in it we find him entertaining great hopes for the universal spread of Christianity of the Unitarian kind. But soon after he seems to have met with disappointment which was probably due to the want of zeal on the part of the Unitarians for mission-work. For we find him giving his support to an invitation sent by some Scottish people in Hindustan to the Scottish Presbyterians of Scotland to establish a mission in the land. Perhaps Ram Mohan had much more in common with these people, though neither he nor they were quite aware of the fact. His motive in inviting them may very likely be the hope that they would do for the educational advancement of the people of this land what the Unitarians were not willing to do. In this he was amply justified, for perhaps of all missions the Scottish Presbyterians have done the most comparatively by way of starting schools and colleges. When in response to this call Dr. Duff came, Ram Mohan was one of his best friends and he did all he could to give him a good start in his educational work. As for the Unitarian Committee it was re-organized and enlarged into the British Indian Unitarian Association in 1827 but in vain. It was a plant too exotic to thrive on the Hindu soil. The next year the Brahma Sabha came into existence and the Unitarian Mission practically came to an end.

It was only for a couple of years that Ram Mohan worked for this new body. But it was a natural growth of all his active efforts during the last decade and a half for the revival of the pure Vedic religion among his

people. Even while he was working for the spread of Unitarianism, he was not indifferent to this work. To lead the Hindus back to the Vedanta which he called "Hindu Theism" was one of the main tasks of his life, and he spared no pains to do it. He had translated most of the Upanishads into Bengali and English and published them. He had written several tracts in English for the propagation of the truths that he had found in them. Most of his Bengali works were written solely for that purpose. Thus the ground had been well prepared and so the Brahma Sabha took root.

In 1830 Ram Mohan left Hindustan for England which he had long been intending to visit. He had also some work to do there on behalf of the Mogul Emperor as well as the people of this country. The Emperor invested him with the title of Raja and it was as his ambassador that he went to Europe. He stayed there a little over two years and was all the while busy with the work which had taken him there. In this he was successful though partially. But his visit to Europe had another and a greater significance. He was one of the very first men to go from this land to the West, and cultural assimilation between the East and the West was the great mission of his life. Some of the Western institutions which he had admired from a distance were seen by him now at close quarters, but that did not abate his enthusiasm for them. This is true especially of the political institutions of the West. In regard to this perhaps he preferred France to England. It was in the field of religion, however, that there seems to have been some modification of his views or rather of

emphasis. It was in England that he saw orthodox Christianity at its best, and he found the difference between Unitarianism and Trinitarianism in practical life, a difference which was not altogether in favour of the former. He found the orthodox people abounding in good works, and one is surprised to find this rigorous iconoclast praising even the Roman Catholics for their noble work of charity and benevolence. He also saw the tendency on the part of Unitarianism to run into latitudinarianism, and what he came to know of the extreme freedom of thought in some quarters even frightened him. Although his intellectual kinship was with the Unitarians to the last, he was feeling more and more at home with the evangelical section of the Anglican Church in the matter of feeling and sentiment. One wonders whether there would have been any change in his attitude towards orthodox forms of belief among Hindus on his return to his motherland. But this was not to be. He passed away in that far-off country at Bristol on the 29th September 1833.

Rajarshi Ram Mohan Roy will ever be remembered by his countrymen as the founder of the Brahma Samaj and the father of New Hindustan. He was pre-eminently the herald of the New Age that has dawned upon Hindustan ever since its closer contact with the West which began about a century and half back. He was peculiarly qualified to serve as a guide and leader of the country by his unique gifts and acquirements. There have been few men in the whole of history who have studied so closely the three great religious cultures, viz., Hindu, Moslem and Christian, which have met in this

land. This will always stand to his credit. In his own time Mohammedans called him a *jabardust*<sup>1</sup> *Moulvie*, and the Unitarians looked upon him as a great *padri*.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the Hindus have since his time called him a great Acharya.<sup>3</sup> Eminent scholars of the West have acknowledged him to be the "founder of the comparative study of Religions." The *Mantra* or the watchword that he gave to his country as the result of a life-long search for religious truth is *Ekmevadwityam*, One God without a second, and His spiritual worship. This was the one ruling passion of his life. To it he devoted his all, and he was prepared to give his life for it. This ideal of his he embodied in the Brahma Sabha which was his chiet legacy to his countrymen.

As has been said above, this spiritual worship was not divorced from life: rather it meant fuller life. Rajarshi Ram Mohan was the first man in modern times to recover and enrich the meaning of *Grihastashram*, the householder's stage of life, and thus led Hindustan out of the slough of medieval monasticism in which much of the Hindu religious life had remained encased for centuries. He wanted even to fill this life with the quite new and large content of Modern Culture and Science, and himself became a pioneer in this art of leading a larger life. Strange as it may seem, he is still our most versatile man of thought and action in spite of all the progress made during the course of a century.

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1 Great religious teacher.

2 Father in the sense of a great religious teacher.

3 Eminent religious teacher.

This great man was withal a man of large and tender heart. His passion for liberty and his chivalry towards womankind, which were noted characteristics of his life, had their root in his deep feeling for the weak and the poor and the down-trodden. His work on behalf of womankind in a number of ways has perhaps been unsurpassed since his days. His work against the practice of suttee has been mentioned. He fought against polygamy and pleaded for a share to be given to woman in her father's property. His sympathy with the rack-rented ryot of Hindustan or of Ireland was deep and he worked for them in what way he could. He spent his money and himself unstintingly in the cause of all. Indeed, he was a genuine lover of humanity, a true citizen of the world, and for that very reason a true servant and son of Hindustan. He worked and fought like a valiant soldier of God, like a hero, putting even his life in danger more than once. His crossing the *Kala Pani*, the forbidden black waters, at the ripe age of about sixty, in those days of very slow travel, and his death in that far-off place away from his kith and kin, is a fitting consummation of a life of adventure, heroism and noble service. Rightly he is universally honoured in the land by people of all communities and creeds. He is perhaps the only one in modern times who has been so enshrined in the hearts of all his countrymen.

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### CHAPTER III

### THE BRAHMA SABHA.

( CONTINUED )

The Brahma Sabha managed to live, somehow or other, for about a decade more after Ram Mohan left the country. This was chiefly due to Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagish. He was a true follower of Ram Mohan and was appointed the minister of the Sabha for his religious earnestness. He carried on the work in the absence of his master with much zeal in spite of all kinds of discouragement. The outward world was altogether indifferent if not hostile, and many of the members too who had been drawn by the weight and influence of Ram Mohan gradually left the Sabha. Lonely and sad, indeed, must have been the figure of Vidyavagish as he watched the slow decline of this institution which was left to his care, and many a prayer must have gone from his heart to the Almighty God to raise up some one who might carry on the work of his master. His prayers were heard after all, a young man full of spiritual life was raised up and Vidyavagish had the satisfaction of passing on the torch lighted by Ram Mohan to his hands.

This young man was Devendranath, a son of Dwarkanath Tagore who was one of the greatest co-adjutors of Ram Mohan in most of his undertakings and was the one person whose support never failed the Brahma Sabha even during these years of hard struggle. As for Devendranath, he had a special gift for religion in his especially gifted family. His mind was drawn towards religion early in life, and he became very



religious in his youth. Ramchandra Vidyavagish came to have some influence over him at this stage particularly as the spiritual progress of Devendra had led him in the direction shown by Ram Mohan. He had begun a serious study of the Upanishads, and had already established more than one society for the propagation of the truths of the same. The chief of these was the *Tatwa-bodhini Sabha*,<sup>1</sup> with a monthly magazine of its own, called *Tattwa-bodhini* <sup>2</sup>*Patrica*. This Sabha celebrated its first anniversary in 1842 with much enthusiasm and éclat. It had a large membership, some of the members being men of high rank and culture. Naturally the Brahma Sabha and the Tattwa-bodhini Sabha were drawn to each other, and in course of time the younger merged itself into the older. This brought much life and strength to the Brahma Sabha. The beginning of this new stage in its life was marked by the public initiation of Devendranath with nineteen more at the hands of Vidyavagish in the year 1843. Pandit Shivnath Shastri thus describes the event in his History of the Brahma Samaj:—

As the twenty young men, dressed in suitable attire, approached the Pundit, and repeated with reverential awe the solemn words of the covenant, the feelings of the old minister overpowered him to such an extent that he sobbed like a child, and could not deliver the sermon he had intended to preach, but only said, "Oh! how I wish that Ram Mohan Roy were present on this day!"

Indeed, the old Pundit Vidyavagish was living but to see this day, for he passed away only the next year.

1 An Association for the propagation of spiritual truth.

2 A paper for the propagation of spiritual truth.

The covenant and initiation mentioned here were new things in the Brahma Sabha, and they were introduced through the influence of Devendranath. He had already found that the Sabha was not only declining, but that even those few who remained were not true to the lines that Ram Mohan had laid down. So far was this true that even such an un-Brahmic doctrine as the incarnation of Ram was being preached from the pulpit. Besides, most of the members were leading a sort of double life, talking of non-idolatry in the Sabha and practising idolatry at home. This shocked the strong religious sense of Devendra, and he tried to remedy the evil from the beginning of his connection with the Sabha. For this purpose he introduced a covenant for acceptance and observance by every member of the body, and he and his friends were the first to sign it.

He also took immediately in hand the reorganization of the divine service. Ram Mohan had left too early after the establishment of the Sabha to do all this, and if any change was made in the interval it was for the worse. Devendranath, therefore, at once introduced a definite order of service with *Udbodhan* (exhortation), *Aradhana* (adoration) and *Prarthana* (prayer), respectively interspersed with religious songs. In all probability, this very form of worship is in use even to-day in the Adi Brahma Samaj, and if there is any variation it must be very slight. The same form is in use in the Brahma Samaj at large, with this difference, however, that while the Sanskrit element drawn from the Upanishads chiefly preponderates in the Adi Samaj,

there is more freedom for a free outpouring of the religious feelings of the minister in the latter. Those who have used this form of worship as a religious *sadhana* i.e. as a sort of devotional help, whether for personal or congregational use, have found it very helpful indeed.

Alongside with this reorganization of the Sabha on its spiritual side, Devendranath started propaganda work in right earnest. With the help of his enthusiastic friends he republished some of the works of Ram Mohan Roy. The Tattwa-bodhini Patrica was put under the editorial management of Akshay Kumar Dutt, a man of real literary powers. He is spoken of as the intellectual leader of the new band, while Devendranath was the leader in the religious sphere. Under him the Patrica rose to be a power on account of its high level of thought and style, and some of the foremost literary men and scholars contributed valuable articles on religious and literary subjects to it. It was one of the first magazines of a serious kind in the vernacular, and as such it wielded much influence over a large class of readers. Later on an English section was added to it so that it might be useful to people of other parts of Hindustan as well. English translations of the Upanishads and probably a part of the Rig Veda were published in it, and on its behalf it is claimed that it was one of the first agencies in new Hindustan to draw the attention of the people to this most ancient of scriptural books.

Besides doing this work, Akshay Kumar Dutt was in charge of a kind of Theological School, called Tattwa-bodhini Pathshala. This institution was meant to train

young men in the principles of Hindu Theism as found in the Upanishads. Dutt was a student of rational theology, and he seems to have been a radical rationalist. He chafed at the idea of Vedic or any other infallibility from the start, and he had certainly something to do with the raising of that question which soon became vital and ultimately threw the Vedas overboard. After this was done, he proceeded to rationalize still further the doctrines of the Brahma Sabha and to introduce a sort of constitution in the management of its affairs. He was also a strong advocate of all such reforms as remarriage of widows, abolition of polygamy etc. He started a society called Atmiya Sabha in order probably to organize the new forces of which he was the mouthpiece. So great was the faith of Dutt and his friends in the voice of majority that they proceeded even to settle questions about the existence of particular attributes of God (thank Heavens, it was not His existence) by taking votes thereupon. Poor Devendranath had a very hard time in dealing with these radicals. About Dutt he says in his autobiography: "Akshaya Kumar Dutt started a Friends' Society, in which the nature of God was decided upon by a show of hands. For instance, somebody asked, "Is God the personification of bliss or not?" Those who believed in His blissfulness held up their hands. Thus the truth or otherwise of God's attributes was decided by a majority of votes." Some time after this Dutt had a serious illness from which he never recovered completely and was forced to retire from the Sabha.

But not to anticipate, the Tattwa-bodhini Pathashala did very useful work in giving a theological training to

a number of young men. It was a regular theological school with a Sanskrit professor and other teachers well versed in the Hindu Shastras, particularly the Upanishads which formed the main subject of study. It must have been well organized, for it was removed from Calcutta to Bansberia, a renowned seat of Sanskrit learning at that time, and it had a nice building of its own. It had a prosperous career for about two years when it had to be closed in 1846 for want of funds owing to the great reverse in Tagore's fortune. One of the most important things it did was to draw the attention of most of the members of the Brahma Sabha to the problem of Vedic infallibility. A close study of the Upanishads made it essential for them to inquire into the contents of the Vedas on which the Samaj itself was established. There were other causes also working in the same direction. Akshaya Kumar Dutt's rationalism was too radical to hold anything infallible. Besides, Dr. Duff seems to have raised the question more than once. It is said in the biography of Max Mullar, the great Sanskrit scholar and the translator of the Vedas, that he had drawn the attention of Dwarkanath Tagore to the fact of many fallible beliefs about God and other things in them. Owing to all this a solution of the problem was necessary, and accordingly four students were sent to Benares in 1844-45 to make a close study of the Vedas.

While the work of the Sabha was thus progressing very well in various directions, Devendranath's fortune had a tremendous reverse and everything that he did was seriously affected by it, though he himself emerged out of it a greater man. Hitherto most of the undertakings on behalf of the Sabha were almost entirely,

if not altogether, financed by him, but that was no longer possible. The Pathshala had to be closed, the students sent to Benares had to be recalled and much of the propaganda work also had to be stopped. All this took place in 1847. In addition to this, the growing differences between Devendranath and the party led by Akshaya Kumar Dutt were coming to a head, and this perhaps gave Devendra the acutest pain. However, he stuck to his post and carried on what work could be done under the altered circumstances of his private and public life. It is interesting to note, however, that it was during the next decade that the great question of the infallibility of the Vedas was finally settled, that the Brahma Samaj had started on its new career, that several branches of the Brahma Samaj were organized round about Calcutta, and that new members of note and position were being added to the ranks thereof.

During the period intervening between the accession of Devendranath to the Brahma Samaj in 1843 and that of Keshub Chunder Sen in 1856, the notable doctrinal change in the Samaj that took place was in regard to the question of the infallibility of the Vedas. In the controversy with Dr. Duff, Raj Narayan Bose, a man whose gifts and religious zeal had marked him out from the first as one who would prove very useful to the Samaj, had said that they considered the Vedas and the Vedas alone as the authorized rule of Hindu theology. In his words they were "the sole foundation of all our beliefs and the truths of all other Shastras must be judged according to their agreement with them." He had also said: "What we consider as

revelation is contained in the Vedas alone: and the last part of our holy Scriptures treating of the final dispensation of Hinduism forms what is called Vedanta." This was found difficult to maintain on the report of the scholars who had been sent to Benares. Devendranath himself went to Benares to make personal inquiries in regard to the matter but with the same result. Thus ultimately the infallibility was given up, and with it the character of the Brahma Samaj was wholly changed, though Devendranath was not quite conscious of the fact then.

The question of infallibility had not arisen in such a serious form in the time of Ram Mohan Roy. Rather he had been quite clear in his statement that he looked upon "The Precepts of Jesus" as the purest form of moral and religious truth. However when he was forced to fall back upon the Vedas, under circumstances over which he had no control, it was as the Ethnic Scripture of the Hindus that he accepted them. It was a case of making a virtue of necessity. As a matter of fact he did not accept the verbal inspiration of any scripture whatever. But at the same time, he had the saving good sense, unique in his time, not to impugn the authority of any scripture, provided it upheld the existence of God and moral purity. He believed in what is now called Progressive Revelation. He also believed in the rational powers of man. Hence though he believed no Scripture to be perfect, yet he knew the value of Scripture as such too well to point out only its defects. He was eager to conserve the positive value of all the Scriptures of the world, which is the reason why he treated

them with unfailing respect and reverence. It was only when he thought the cause of moral purity to be in danger that he criticized or attacked any of the Scriptures or Prophets, and that too with much hesitation and reluctance. All this was understood by few and even Devendranath could not realize the full meaning of his work. Thus while with the Rajarshi the Vedic basis of the Brahma Samaj was a religious issue in the broad sense of the term, Devendranath made it more or less an academic question. One wonders what the consequences of keeping the Brahma Samaj on its Vedic basis would have been. In that case in all likelihood there would have been no Arya Samaj with its militant programme, and Dayanand Saraswati would have given himself entirely to the Brahma Samaj as he wanted to do if only its Vedic basis would be restored. This would have meant great gain all round, and the forces of Hindu religious reform being united they would have made a tremendous appeal to the whole country, a thing which they have not been able to do in their divided condition. It would also have saved the Brahma Samaj from running into the barren wilderness of rationalism where its life has been practically extinct in spite of the powerful personalities of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen.

On the other hand it may be said that without this removal of infallibility there would have been no such phenomena in the Hindu religious world as what came to be called the Brahma Dharma, the Bharatvarshiya Brahma Samaj and the New Dispensation. But these are doubtful gains, and even at their best both the Brahma Dharma



and the Nava Vidhan (New Dispensation) have been a sort of mystical sects which have never made a large appeal. There is this to be said, however, on behalf of the Nava Vidhan with its Christo-centre that it is fully consistent with the whole mind and spirit of the Rajarshi, and as such it is a legitimate development of his work. This would not have been possible but for this intervening stage of rationalism, and we might well believe that through it all God Almighty was preparing the nation's mind for His own purpose.

The various stages that the Brahma Samaj passed through within a few years in regard to the question of the authority of the Vedas will be made clear through the following quotations from Devendranath's auto-biography. Even before he joined the Brahma Samaj, in the anniversary meeting of the Tattwabodhini Sabha in 1841 he had said :

There is no doubt that the study of the English language is tending to advance the cause of learning and that the darkness of ignorance has been dispelled in a great measure from the minds of the people of this country. Nowadays they do not feel disposed to worship stocks and stones like the ignorant masses, thinking them to be divine. Not being well acquainted with the Vedanta, they do not know that the gist of our *shastras* is that God is formless, the very essence of intelligence, omnipresent, beyond all thought or speech. So, not finding this pure knowledge of God in their own religion they go to seek it in the *shastras* of other religions. They firmly believe that our *shastras* inculcate image worship only ; therefore they revere those *shastras* which seem to them to be higher than their own. But if the Vedant were spread

far and wide, then we would never feel drawn to other religions. That is why we are thus trying to preserve our Hindu religion.

While differentiating the Vedant he speaks of here from that of Shankaracharya which alone is commonly known by that name he says :

Those Upanishads which treated of Brahma were alone accepted by us as the true Vedanta. We had no faith in Vedantic philosophy because Shankaracharya seeks to prove therein that Brahma and all created beings are one and the same. What we want is to worship God. If the worshipper and the object of worship become one, then how can there be any worship? Therefore, we could not subscribe to the doctrine of the Vedant philosophy. We were opposed to monism just in the same way as we were opposed to idolatry. We were unable to fully acquiesce in the commentaries of the Upanishads as made by Shankaracharya, inasmuch as he had tried to interpret them all in a monistic sense. For this reason I had to write a new commentary of the Upanishads in place of the Bhashya. I indited a Sanskrit commentary which would serve to maintain the theistic basis, and I began a Bengali translation which came out part by part in the Tattwabodhini Patrica.

The next step was taken when the work of the students as well as his own personal inquiry were finished in Benares. The Upanishads themselves had declared that there were two kinds of knowledge in the Vedas, Paravidya and Aparavidya, absolute and empiric knowledge, and he wanted to distinguish between these still further. Now he was "thoroughly convinced that the subject matter of the inferior knowledge in the Vedas

was the various sacrifices in honour of the Gods." He found in the Vedas thirty-three gods, and the presence of Agni, the god of fire, almost everywhere. He says, "therefore I was obliged to give up altogether the hope of propagating the worship of Brahma by means of the Vedas which sanction the *Karmakand*. We now turned from the Vedas and became *Veda-sannyasi* householders." In consequence of this he had to fall back entirely upon the Upanishads in which he found the *Jnanakanda* of the Vedas incorporated. Here another surprise was waiting for him, for he did not find the Upanishads as pure as he had imagined. He says:—

How strange! Formerly I did not know of the existence of this thorny tangle of the Upanishads: only eleven Upanishads were known to me, with the help of which I had started the propagation of the Brahma Dharma, making them its foundation. But now I saw that even this foundation was shaky and built upon sand, even here I did not touch firm ground. First I went back to the Vedas, but could not lay the foundation of the Brahma Dharma there: then I came to the eleven authentic Upanishads, but how unfortunate! Even there I could not lay the foundation. Our relation with God is that of worshipper and worshipped—that is the very essence of Brahmaism..... I had thought that if I renounced the Vedant Darshan and accepted the eleven Upanishads only, I could find a support for Brahmaism: hence I had relied entirely upon these, leaving aside all else. But when in the Upanishads I came across "I am He" and "Thou art That," then I became disappointed in them also.

After these props were taken away one by one, the only thing that was left was, according to him, the intuition of his heart. This became for him henceforth

the basis of what he had begun to call sometime since Brahma Dharma. In regard to this he says:

Where was the foundation to be laid? I came to see that the pure heart, filled with the light of intuitive knowledge—this was its basis. Brahman reigned in the pure heart alone. The pure unsophisticated heart was the seat of Brahmaism. We could accept those texts of the Upanishads which accorded with that heart. Those sayings which disagreed with the heart we could not accept. These were the relations which were now established between ourselves and the Upanishads, the highest of all *shastras*.

Thus was opened the door to rationalism which has practically engulfed the Brahma Samaj. Devendranath, while making intuition the basis of the Samaj, did not seem to realize that he was reducing Brahma Dharma to what has been called by Rev. Lal Behari Dey "the conjugation of the verb to think." Evidently he was ill at ease in this new condition of his mind, and therefore he, very inconsistently with his present belief in intuition as the only foundation of religion, proceeded to lay down the creed of the Samaj. He wrote it out as early as 1848, but it began to be published, with some slight alterations, at the head of the *Tattwabodhini Patrica* from the year 1857. It stands thus:

In the beginning there was only one Supreme Spirit: there was not else. He created all this that is. He is infinite in wisdom and goodness. He is everlasting, all-knowing, all-pervading, all-sustaining, formless, changeless: One only without a second, almighty, self-dependent and perfect: there is none like Him. Our welfare here and hereafter consists only in worshipping Him. To love Him and to do His bidding is to worship Him.

Another very important thing, though inconsistent with his new position, that he did in the year 1848 was the compilation of a book with such texts from the Upanishads as would accord readily with his heart. Now that the Upanishads in a body could not be used as the *Shastra*, he felt the dire need of some such thing. He opened himself to the Divine Spirit by prayer, and at one sitting of three hours, in a fit of internal illumination as it were, dictated the whole of the first part of the book called the "Brahma Dharma." He says :

I laid my heart fervently open to God. The spiritual truths that dawned on my heart through His grace, I went on uttering as fluently and forcibly as the current of a river falling from the mouth of the Upanishads.

This was indeed a remarkable performance for a young man of thirty years only. It shows how deeply he had entered into the spirit of the Upanishads. It was no wonder that he came to be known in course of time as the "Maharshi"\* and that he has been called by some one the personification of the Upanishads. This book was called the Brahmi-Upanishad. Its relation with the Vedas and the Upanishads is thus described by himself :

Let no man think that our Vedas and Upanishads were altogether discarded by me, and that we did not keep in touch with them at all. The Brahma Dharma was built of the essential truths contained in the Vedas and Upanishads, and my heart was witness thereunto. The Brahma Dharma was the fruit on the topmost branch of the Vedic Tree of Life. The Upanishad is the crowning-point of the Vedas and the Brahmi Upanishad is the crowning-point of the Upanishads, the Upanishad

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\* Maharshi means a great Rishi.

relating to Brahma. This has been incorporated in Part I of the Brahma Dharma.

The second part of this book was written later. It consists of such moral commandments as were acceptable to his intuition, selected from such books as Manu Smriti, Mahabharat, Gita, etc. This part was meant to be the moral code of the Brahmas. Each of the two parts consisted of sixteen chapters.

Thus the Brahma Sabha, which was originally an Association of Vedic Unitarians for the purpose of prayer and worship of the Formless One, was changed into a sort of sect with a definite creed and a regular Shastra of its own. Now the Brahmas had found in the person of Devendranath a new Acharya who promulgated and expounded this new scripture. It is doubtful, however, if any one of them including Devendranath himself were conscious of the full significance of the change thus brought about. By adopting the eclectic method, although confining it to the Hindu books, Devendranath had only shown the way to that larger eclecticism which came to be so great a feature of the Brahma Samaj under Keshub Chandra Sen. Nay, even the seed of the New Dispensation was sown in this Brahma Dharma. Its beginning was made here although neither Devendranath, nor any of Keshub's critics, nor perhaps Keshub himself was quite conscious of the fact. It is true Ram Mohan had compiled his "Precepts of Jesus" in the same way as Devendranath had done in regard to this work, but he did not make it a new Scripture, nor did he impugn the authority of the New Testament. Herein lay a great difference.

Henceforth it was this book "Brahma Dharma" which came to be regularly used in place of the Vedas and the Upanishads in the Brahma Samaj. We are told by Devendranath himself that this opened a new chapter in the life of the body. Soon after its publication, the third floor of the Samaj building was ready, and it was in that new hall, decorated beautifully, that the nineteenth anniversary of the Samaj was celebrated with much zeal and éclat. It was in this meeting that the new form of service with the readings and chantings from the "Brahma Dharma" was first used. During the course of this service, a very beautiful prayer of Fénelon, the French mystic, translated into Bengali by Raj Narayan Bose, was read by Devendranath himself. Thus the eclecticism was already growing. Its effect is thus related by Devendra himself:

After this prayer was read I saw that many Brahmas were affected to tears. Such emotion had never before been witnessed in the Brahma Samaj. Hitherto the severe and sacred flame of knowledge alone had been lighted in Brahma's shrine: now He was worshipped with the flowers of heart-felt love.

It was in this way that Bhakti was gradually being added to the Jnana which had been hitherto the chief characteristic of a Brahma.

Besides this change in the basis of the Samaj, there is very little to record by way of doctrinal development or Samajic expansion during the course of this period extending from about 1847 to 1855. Devendranath's hands were tied down for want of funds, and moreover he was busy with his own affairs which had involved him and his family in very great difficulties. This was

not all. He had also much to suffer from the radical party led by Akshay Kumar Dutt which had now not only triumphed to a certain extent but was eager to go further. Devendranath says that he and Akshay Kumar Dutt were as poles asunder. "I was seeking to know my relations with God, he was seeking to know the relations of man with the outer world. The difference was as between heaven and earth." A man called Hazarilal, who had stood by him at all times and had encouraged him in his struggles with the world, was no more with him. Under these circumstances, deeply dejected in his mind and disappointed with the world, he even thought of leaving it. He left for Simla which was then in the absence of railways not so accessible as it is now, with the idea of retiring from life perhaps for good. He stayed on the Himalayan hills for about two years and then came down only at the command of the Spirit, when a new surprise was awaiting him in Calcutta.

The progress that the Brahma Sabha had made from the year 1843 when Devendra joined it to 1855 or rather to 1848 until which year only the Samaj was very active, was not little. In the first place it had been able to secure a definite creed with a definite theology. The theology of the Brahma Sabha of Ram Mohan was largely deistic with a tinge of Pantheism in it. The text of the very first sermon that was preached therein was "God is one only without an equal. In Him abide all worlds and their inhabitants. Thus he who mentally perceives the Supreme Spirit in all creatures acquires perfect equanimity, and shall be absorbed into the highest essence, even into the Almighty." This had been developed into pure Theism enriched by a warm personal experience and



realization. By the definite theolgy now introduced and embodied in the "Brahma Dharma," Adwaitvada,\* Avtarvada† and Mayavad‡ as well as Metempsychosis, all of which found place in much of Hindu literature, were for ever tabooed. On its positive side, this Theism, by its belief in creation as distinct from emanation and in the essentially moral nature of human personality which made it impossible for it to go back to the lower orders of creation through the cycle of rebirth, came as near Christian theology as it could without believing in the essential dogmas of Christianity. All this was not pure coincidence or the work of intuition entirely, for it would be certainly too much to say that intuition began to work for the first time here in Hindustan unerringly. It was directly or indirectly the result of contact with the Western and Christian learning. The negative criticism of Christian missionaries who had attacked almost all such beliefs as Re-incarnation, Mayavad, Adwaitvad etc. as well as the positive teachings of rationalists and modern philosophers of the West to which Devendranath and his companions owed not a little, were having their due influence in the shaping and maturing of the Theism of the Brahma Samaj.

The question may well be asked how far this Brahma Dharma had permeated the lives of the members of the Samaj. The answer to this would be that in spite of all the efforts of the devout and enthusiastic young leader made to imbue his fellow-believers with the high spirituality of his own character, there was not

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\* Monism.

† Belief in incarnation.

‡ Belief in the world as an illusion.

much permanent result. For a short time only, particularly the first two or three years of the life of the Tattwabodhini Sabha, there was a good deal of religious enthusiasm and fellow-feeling. But the experience of novelty soon wore off, and instead there arose controversies and differences of a serious nature. The only man besides Devendranath who had allowed his life to be possessed by the spirit of this new religion was Hazarilal, and he too had left Bengal for ever, perhaps in disgust. Thus the Brahma Dharma which it was Devendra's dream to spread all over the land, had not penetrated further than the lives of a few individuals only. In these cases it was largely a personal affair while their home-life conformed perhaps fully to the customary idolatry. The only exception was that of Devendranath who performed the *Shraddha* ceremony of his father without idolatry, according to some Vedic texts which he had been able to find for the purpose. This was done in the face of much opposition from his own people and for it he had to incur much opprobrium from the public inasmuch as his was one of the most eminent families in Bengal. This was the first event of its kind in the history of the Brahma Samaj, and it showed that the new religion made claims which it was not always easy to satisfy. Possibly this exposition of its true character together with the waning of Devendranath's fortune which soon followed was enough to scare away all those weaker spirits who may have gathered round the young leader in the hope of basking in the sunshine of cultural refinement and worldly prosperity. It was a sort of double eclipse and consequently there was a great ebb in the fortunes of the Samaj.

## Chapter IV

## MAHARSHI DEVENDRANATH TAGORE

Devendranath, the father of the great poet Ravindranath Tagore, was the eldest son of Dwarkanath Tagore. He was born in 1817 and studied for some time in the school founded by Ram Mohan Roy who was his father's great friend. In these young days of his he had known something of the great man whose mantle was to fall on his shoulders so worthily later on. One of the reminiscences of the Rajarshi given by him might well be reproduced here. He says : "Sometimes I went and played many mischievous pranks there.\* I used to pluck the *lichis* and pick the green-peas in the garden and eat them in great glee. One day Ram Mohan said, "Brother, why roam about in the sun? Sit down here and eat as many *lichis* as you can." To the gardener he said, "Go and get *lichis* from the trees and bring them here." He immediately brought a plateful of them. Then Ram Mohan said, "Eat as many *lichis* as you can." His appearance was calm and dignified. I used to look up to him with great respect and reverence. There was a swing in the garden in which Ram Mohan Roy used to swing by way of exercise. When I went to the garden of an afternoon he used to make me sit in it and make me swing himself. After a time he would sit in it himself and say, "Brother, now it is your turn to push."

Dwarkanath Tagore was a big landlord and besides a man of much wealth. He was called "Indian

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\* The garden-house of Ram Mohan.

Croesus" for his magnificent style of living and for his riches in Parisian circles among whom he lived off and on. As the son of such a big man Devendranath was bred in luxury, but by Providence he was meant to drink another cup than the one of worldly happiness. In his eighteenth year he was deeply affected by the death of his grandmother, and the event created in him a feeling of true Vairagya, a sense of the unreality of things, which never left him. In his beautiful auto-biography, a document of great value, he thus describes the occasion:

At this opportune moment a strange sense of the unreality of all things suddenly entered my mind. I was as if no longer the same man. A strange aversion to wealth arose within me. The coarse bamboo-mat on which I sat seemed to be my fitting seat, carpets and costly spreadings seemed hateful, in my mind was awakened a joy unfelt before.

From this moment his interest in the world was lost for ever, and only "God and the Hereafter" took possession of his heart. He made continuous progress in the understanding of spiritual things, those deep things of God which only the favoured ones of God know, and which made him a veritable Maharshi of modern times. It is true the joy which his first experience of spiritual life had brought was soon gone, but the sense of renunciation remained. During this period of desolation he sought solitary places where he might give himself entirely to contemplation in order to win back the blessedness he had known though for a short time only. He thought that he might find what he wanted in religious literature in Sanskrit and accordingly he took up the

study of the language and read the Mahabharat. He studied the works of English and other philosophers also. But none of these things brought him any nearer the knowledge of God he was seeking. Thus he was thrown more and more on his own resources, and by much inward thought and contemplation he received light. He saw in all things the presence as well as the supremacy of mind over matter, of God over nature. He came to understand that God who creates and presides over the universe is infinite as well as formless, and thus in his own words "the axe was laid at the root of idolatry." After coming to this conclusion by himself he looked out for response from somebody but found none. But what he failed to find in the present he found in the past. He says:

As soon as I came to understand that God was without form or image, a strong antipathy to idolatry arose in my mind. I remembered Ram Mohan Roy—I came to my senses. I pledged my heart and soul to follow in his footsteps.

Henceforth he was no more alone. He had found his Guru though the Guru was no more in the world. Ram Mohan Roy as mentioned above was a very great friend of his father, and what little he had known of the great man was very helpful to him at this time. Devendranath relates the following anecdote in connection with the present state of his mind:

It was the time of the Durga Puja in the month of Ashwin. I went to invite Ram Mohan Roy to this festival, and said "Ram Mani Thakur\* begs to invite you to attend the Puja for three days." Upon this he said, "Brother, why come

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\* His grandfather.

to me? Go and ask Radhaprasad.” \* Now after all this lapse of time I understood the purport and meaning of those words. Since then I inwardly resolved that as Ram Mohan Roy did not take part in any image-worship or idolatry, so would I not join in them either.

While he was thus being gradually purified and prepared, he received what was to prove the greatest influence on his life. This was in the shape of “a page from some Sanskrit book” that came to him driven by some chance wind. If there ever was a heaven-sent message on a stray piece of paper, it was on that. As he could not understand the meaning of what was written on it, he gave it to his Pundit to explain it to him. As the Pundit was not able to do this satisfactorily, they called in the aid of Ram Chandra Vidyavagish, the minister of the Brahma Sabha. He found it to be a part of *Isopanishad*. On learning the meaning of the text therein, Devendranath found the response he was seeking so long. He says : †

I had been eager to receive a sympathetic response from men ; now a divine voice had descended from heaven to respond in my heart of hearts, and my longing was satisfied. I wanted to see God everywhere, and what did I find in the Upanishads? I found “If the whole world could be encompassed by God, where would impurity be? Then all would be pure, the world would be full of sweetness.” I got just what I wanted. I have never heard my inmost thoughts expressed like this anywhere else. Could men give any such response? The very mercy of God descended into my heart.”

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\* Ram Mohan Roy's son.

† Auto-biography.

The joy he was looking for so long in vain had now come back to him. He read the Upanishads one by one with Ramchandra Vidyavagish and other Pundits, and grew in spiritual knowledge and joy. With this there came a desire to spread the knowledge he had gained, and accordingly he started, with the help of some of his relatives and friends, an association called *Tattwaranjini Sabha*. This was soon changed into *Tattwabodhini Sabha* at the instance of Ram Chandra Vidyavagish who was made Acharya thereof. This took place in 1839 when Devendranath was barely twenty one years old.

This Sabha used to meet once a month when some prayers were read by the presiding minister Vidyavagish. He also addressed the meeting and papers were read by some of the members too. It was under the auspices of this Sabha that texts from the Vedas were recited publicly to a very large audience composed of all classes of people at its anniversary meeting in 1841. Possibly this was the first instance, at least for centuries, when texts from the Vedas were recited before a mixed audience like that, without any respect to those restrictions which have always been placed upon the recitation of these sacred books before certain classes of people. Soon after this Devendranath joined the Brahma Sabha and a little later the Tattwabodhini Sabha came to be amalgamated with it. How this union became a source of strength to the Brahma Sabha has been already mentioned.

One very noticeable thing about Devendranath was that he was possessed with the idea of Dharma ( religion in the full sense of the term ), and even from the day of his initiation into the Brahma Samaj, he was anxious to

have a pure and perfect religion which he called Brahma Dharma. The Brahma Sabha as only a prayer-meeting had not much attraction for him. To him Brahma and Dharma were inseparable. He wanted a full-orbed religion. Regarding his initiation along with twenty others he says :

This was an unprecedented event in the annals of the Brahma Samaj. Formerly there existed the Brahma Samaj, now the Brahma Dharma came into existence. There can be no Dharma without Brahma, nor can Brahma be obtained without Dharma. Having realized this close connection, we embraced the Brahma Dharma, and thereby became Brahmas, thus justifying the existence of the Brahma Samaj.

In accordance with this view of the Samaj, he introduced a covenant obliging every member of the Sabha to practise the religion of the Sabha in his daily life, and he was the first to accept this new pledge at his initiation. It was the same zeal for a living religion in the life of the Samaj that made him carry out those reforms in worship and practice that have been mentioned in the previous chapter.

While he was engaged in this arduous task, a task which he had to perform in the midst of great difficulties, there happened an event in his life which showed what a living embodiment he was of the religion he was holding and preaching. His father Dwarkanath Tagore died deeply involved in debt to the extent of over a crore of rupees. All this huge debt he had contracted in the name of a firm of which he was the principal director. His assets were not half as much



and he had taken special care to provide for his family by making a trust of a part of his property. Thus the creditors had no legal claim over this property, and they were prepared to accept the rest of the property in lieu of what was due to them. At this stage Devendranath as the head of the family intervened and said that he did not want the trust made on behalf of the family. This meant a tremendous sacrifice and he made it deliberately. On his return from the meeting Devendra felt supremely happy and looked upon this action of his as a sort of *Vishvajit Yajna*, a world-conquering sacrifice. At first the entire estate was taken charge of by the creditors, and only a limited sum was granted to the Tagore family for its maintenance. But very soon they put the management of it in his hands, and in course of years he paid off all that huge debt. This was not all. He paid large amounts of money that were promised as charities by his father, and that too with interest from the date of promise. All this could not but be of very great help in the building up of his moral and religious character. In connection with this sacrifice that he made he says :

What I had desired came to pass. I wanted to renounce the world and the world left me of its own accord. What a singular coincidence ! I had prayed to my God—I desire nothing but Thee !—and the Lord in His mercy granted my prayer. He took away everything from me and revealed Himself unto me. My heart's desire was fulfilled to the letter.

One of the chief features of his character even at this early period was what may be called a passion for the realization of God in nature as well as self. It was a regular practice with him to go out of Calcutta on some

tour or other during the Puja festival, \* and at such time whether he would be on sea or on river or in some especially beautiful part of the country-side, he would sit for hours completely absorbed in realizing the presence of God in nature, and that day after day. This habit of communion with God increased with him year by year, and during his later life extending over decades he lived in as close a fellowship with God as has fallen to the lot of few men to do. As he advanced in years, he began to look inward more and more, and it was within the self that he tried to realize God as contrasted with the earlier period in which his communion was through Nature. For this inward realization he found the *Gayatri Mantra* very helpful. In regard to this he says :

From now I began to train myself to listen for his command and understand the difference between my own inclination and His will. What seemed to me to be the insidious promptings of my own desires I was careful to avoid and what appeared to my conscience to be His command, that I tried to follow. Then I prayed to Him to inspire me with righteousness, to guard me with moral strength, to give me patience, courage, fortitude and contentment. What profit beyond all expectation had I not gained by adopting the *Gayatri Mantra* ! I had seen Him face to face, had heard His voice of command, and had become His constant companion. I could make out that He was guiding me seated within my heart.....I felt that, ever enshrined within my heart, He taught me wisdom like a Guru, and prompted me to good deeds, so that I exclaimed "Thou art

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\* This festival is in honour of the Goddess Kali and it lasts for several days. It falls in the month of Ashwin when the monsoon having just ended the nature wears its best appearance. One of the reasons for Devendranath's leaving home was to avoid idolatrous worship connected with this festival.

Father too and Mother. Thou art the Guru and bestower of all wisdom." He says this was his experience while he was twenty-eight years old.

A life so full of zeal and passion for contemplation and meditation was perhaps ill-fitted to meet all the requirements of a strenuous life of the world. The financial worries and entanglements in which he was involved through no fault of his own, as well as the trouble that he met with from his relations and some of the members of the Samaj came very near breaking his stoical spirit. This is how he describes the wilderness of the world in which he was living at that time :

Amongst many of those who surrounded me, who were as my very limbs, I could no longer see any signs of religious feeling or piety: each only pitted his own intellect and power against the others. Nowhere did I obtain a sympathetic response. My antipathy and indifference to the world grew apace. This profited me greatly in one respect, inasmuch as I became eager to descend into the deeper recesses of my soul in search of the Supreme Soul. I began to inquire into the first principles. I resolved to realize in my life by discovering their inner meaning, and to test by the light of reason, those truths that had come floating to me on the waves of spiritual emotion by the grace of God.

Accordingly he left Calcutta for Simla at the end of the year 1855, and visited several places on his way such as Benares, Agra, Delhi, Amritsar etc. At Delhi he met a Sannyasi called Sukhanand Swami who said to him, "I and Ram Mohan Roy are both disciples of Hari Haranand Tirthswamy. Ram Mohan Roy was a Tantric like myself." At Mathura he found MSS of translations in Hindi of most of the works of Ram

Mohan Roy with another Tantric. At Amritsar he was very much impressed with the constant worship of God performed in the golden temple, twenty-one hours in twenty-four. This he could not but sadly contrast with the worship for about a couple of hours at the most in a week in the Brahma Samaj. Once he was on the Himalayas he was steeped in the contemplation of God in the midst of the grandeur and beauty of those wonderful mountains. He spent his days and nights even in deep meditation over those first principles, the questions concerning the nature of the soul, its Whenceforth and Witherward, which he had come hither to solve. Here the Upanishads and Hafiz the Sufi poet of Persia were his companions and guides, and he derived much solace and strength from them as well as his meditations. The Theism of the Brahma Dharma, the outline of which he had sketched so clearly and fully in the book called the "Brahma Dharma" became a matter of living experience. So great was his realization of those great truths that we hear him saying with the Rishis of the Upanishads :

"Henceforth I shall radiate light  
from my heart upon the world :  
For I have reached the Sun,  
and darkness has vanished."

The Spirit of the Rishis came upon him, entered into and abode in him, and he became a Rishi, a Maharishi himself. After this was accomplished, one day while watching a limpid stream of water running furiously downward and in that act getting itself more and

more sullied, and musing thereupon, he says he heard the solemn commandment of the Guide within :

Give up thy pride, and be lowly like this river. The truth thou hast gained, the devotion and trustfulness that thou hast learnt here, go and make them known to the world.

In obedience to this command, although against his own inclination, he left Simla after a stay there for about two years and reached Calcutta in 1858. Thus while Hindustan was passing through the great turmoil of the Mutiny, a sage and seer was being perfected on the heights of the Himalayas for the work of reform and reconstruction that was soon to begin in the land. In this work the Brahma Samaj under the leadership of Keshub was destined to play a most important part. Keshub was then a youth of only twenty years, and it was for his education and guidance during these early years of his life that Devendranath was required.

Very significantly his auto-biography, a document of rare spiritual worth, from which most of the passages quoted in this chapter are taken, comes to a close with his return to Calcutta. For about a decade more, he led the life of an active minister of the Samaj, during which time by his glowing and luminous exposition of the truths of the Brahma Dharma in his sermons he inspired the band of young men with Keshub at its head with his own love and passion for God. These have been since published under the name of *Brahma Dharmer Vyakh-yana*, Exposition of the Brahma Dharma. The book has been translated into more than one vernacular of the land, and it richly deserves to be translated into every vernacular. It contains the quintessence of the

Upanishadic teaching and is very elevating in its thoughts and sentiments. Long after these sermons were given, Pratap Chandra Moozamdar who was one of the most appreciative and impressionable of the band of young men spoken of above, wrote in a letter to Devendranath the following concerning them :

The strange beatitudes of the spirit of God, which in glowing words and with feelings whose glow was still more secret and profound, you pointed out in the golden sanctuary of the soul, have not been silenced, though you have been silent ever so long.....And amid the complexities of doctrines and practices that characterize the Brahma Samaj of to-day, I can still vividly trace the outlines of the sweet and glorious conceptions, as sweet as simple, that distilled from your teachings like heavenly dew.

Elsewhere in regard to them Moozamdar says :

The raptures of such ( direct and personal ) communion, the grandeur of the spirit-world, the peace of resignation, the beauty of God as the Father and Mother of mankind, the glory of God as the Saviour of sinners, the hopes of a blessed eternity and everlasting companionship of God in heaven where there is no weeping and no bitterness, where joy alone reigneth for ever, have been pictured with thrilling eloquence in the celebrated *Vyakhyanas* which he has delivered in the Samaj. These sermons, we may say without fear of contradiction, are of a masterly kind and outvie any which have been published on similar subjects here or in Europe. In depth of thought, grandeur of sentiment and beauty of style they are excellent and will continue to speak to endless generations of our community of the noble soul whose emanations they are in a more impressive manner than we can possibly hope to do.

Later on serious differences arose between him and Keshub which culminated in the establishment of the

Bharatvarshiya Brahma Samaj. Devendranath was about fifty when this took place and he retired from all active work in connection with the Brahma Samaj. He lived for nearly forty years more, during which long period his one occupation was to realize God more and more in nature, in self, and in the self-existent nature of God Himself. This was a sort of the three-fold Yoga which he had begun to practise ever since he was thirty years old, and in which he had progressed all along. Once more now he devoted himself to the acquisition of the knowledge of those first principles which had led him to the Himalayas in 1855. So much did he progress in spiritual life, in realization of the Spirit-God who presides over nature and is the Soul of Souls, that it is no exaggeration to say that in him the Hindu consciousness of the Rishi type rose to its highest in modern times. Besides, he offers the unique example of a man who could rise to such a height of religious experience without opening himself to those positive influences of religious cultures other than his own. In this he is quite different from either his predecessor Ram Mohan Roy or his successor Keshub Chandra Sen. He became aware of these limitations when it was perhaps too late for him to yield himself to the new influences which were beginning to open his eyes to the basal fact in religion that truth is not confined to any country or clime. In his reply to the letter of Moozomdar quoted above he wrote :

In the love for our country we have felt the desire of wisdom in us to be satisfied by what our own Rishis have taught.

But he, \* inspired with a love catholic and extraordinary, has prepared himself to bring about a reconciliation between the monotheists of Hindustan with those of Arabia and Palestine.

To Mr. Dall, a Unitarian missionary who had come over from America drawn solely by the Unitarian writings of Ram Mohan, Devendranath once said : " I was called to defend the Vedantic side of Ram Mohan, and you the Gospel side of him." He thus testified to the larger and universal character of the mission of the Rajarshi.

Whatever be his limitation in this or that direction it is undoubted that he was a mystic and a seer in the true sense of the term. The title of ' Maharshi ' which was first used in regard to him by Keshub, his chief disciple, has been now universally accepted as the true designation of the great and noble soul. Already he with his unique character is enshrined in the loving memory of numbers of men and women, not only in Hindustan, but all over the world, and he will always draw hearts of people seeking after realization of God through nature and self to himself.

He passed away at the ripe old age of eighty eight years in 1905.



## Chapter V

## THE CALCUTTA BRAHMA SAMAJ

On his return from the Himalayas in 1858, the Maharshi found Keshub Chunder Sen a member of the Samaj. This was a welcome surprise to him because Keshub's family was well-known in Calcutta, and moreover Keshub was known to him as a friend of his son Satyendranath. Though Keshub was at this time a young man of twenty, his life had already taken a very serious turn and Devendra found in him a most apt disciple. He entered into all the ideals and plans of Devendranath with great enthusiasm, and as he had already been able to draw a band of young men to himself, these too were inspired with a like enthusiasm. Thus a period of unprecedented activity in the Brahma Samaj began, and a new day dawned not only for this body but for the whole country.

One of the first important things to be done by the Samaj now was the establishment of the "Brahma School." This was meant to give a moral and religious training to young men by means of weekly lectures in both Bengali and English. Already Devendranath's inspired sermons together with the hymns composed by his son Satyendranath had proved a source of great attraction to the cultured and religious-minded people of Calcutta. The Brahma School was meant to do a similar work among young men, and in it the theological lectures in Bengali were given by Devendra while those in English were given by Keshub. Much interest and enthusiasm were aroused by these lectures and young men flocked to

hear them. It was in this school that a number of young men received a sound training in the principles of the Brahma Dharma. Many of these became members and a few became missionaries of the Samaj. Besides, it was in this school that Keshub acquired those powers of eloquence which he used all his life for the cause of God he had espoused so early. These lectures were published as tracts, and besides a number of exhortatory tracts were written.

An institution far more important than this School was the one called *Sangat Sabha*. This was a sort of religious fellowship meeting, the name *Sangat* being taken from the Sikhs. This name seems to have been suggested to the mind of Devendranath who christened the society from what he had seen of Sikhism in the Punjab. There were several societies of this name started at the same time by Brahmas in different parts of Calcutta, but the most important and fruitful was the one in which Keshub and his friends met together. It is thus spoken of by Pundit Shivnath in his *History of the Brahma Samaj* :

The *Sangat Sabha* may be truly said to have been the seed-plot of New Brahmaism. The old school of Brahmas, with a few exceptions, conformed to the idolatrous practices of orthodox Hindu society at home, confining their Brahmaism to mere intellectual assent to the preachings of the Samaj. But the young men under the influence of their young leader daily imbibed a new inspiration from Western sources. During this period Mr. Sen cultivated the private friendship of some Christian missionaries, and under his guidance the members of the *Sangat* made a careful study of the Bible and of the works of Theodore Parker, Prof. Newman and Miss Cobbe. Their

Christian studies developed in their lives the Christian spirit of repentance and prayer and they formed a solemn resolve to reduce their new convictions to practice. The influence that the Sangat exercised on the minds of the young men was something indescribable.....They daily imbibed new inspiration from their new studies, read with avidity letters from such Western thinkers as Prof. F. W. Newman, discussed important points of philosophy, as laid down by Sir William Hamilton and Victor Cousin, the two philosophical writers who most influenced them at that period, and often separated at the end of their friendly gatherings with redoubled resolutions to lay down their lives at the altar of their new faith. At the meetings of the Sangat they decided to give up caste, to discard the sacred Brahmanical thread, to accept no invitation to any idolatrous festival, to give no countenance to the dancing of public women, to practise temperance, to give their wives and sisters the advantages of the light they had themselves received and to be strictly truthful, honest and just in all their dealings with their fellow-men.

The substance of these discussions was published by Keshub under the name of "Brahma Dharmer Anusthan" the Practice of Brahma Dharma, in the Tattwabodhini Patrica at first, and later on in the form of a book by itself. Devendranath himself was deeply impressed by this and it is said that on account of its influence he discarded his own Brahmanical thread and abolished from his family all idolatrous practices whatsoever including the Durga Puja. The marriage of his second daughter which took place about this time was solemnized according to a ceremony framed by himself from the Vedic texts, a ceremony which kept as close to the prevalent one as possible except with regard to the idolatrous practices thereof. This was the first marriage

performed under the auspices of the Brahma Samaj, and as such it created much enthusiasm in the younger party.

Thus a Brahma Samaj within the Brahma Samaj was being created, a body which was dominated by what is called the "Christian spirit" by Shivnath Shastri. The chief characteristics of this spirit at this time were religiously a deep sense of sin, repentance and prayer, and socially a deeper and larger sense of fraternity. The first fruits of this spirit manifested themselves in Keshub's throwing off all secular work and with it all that the world had to offer in order that he may be able to devote himself entirely to the work of the Brahma Samaj. This took place in 1861. He was soon followed by others, and thus was formed that nucleus of a missionary body which was fired with apostolical zeal and which made the Brahma Samaj what it came to be in course of time.

Along with these activities Keshub carried on others of a social and philanthropic nature. The question of the widows was just coming to the fore, thanks mainly to the noble efforts made by Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Keshub wanted to help this cause. Accordingly he with the help of his friends staged a drama which ran through several nights and taught people many a lesson concerning the sad plight of the widows. At about this time there was a dreadful famine in Upper Hindustan, and Keshub undertook to collect funds for the famine-stricken people there on behalf of the Samaj. This was the first activity of its kind which the Samaj undertook, and so it created a new

sense of responsibility among the members thereof. This was followed by similar activities whenever occasions arose, and even to-day the Brahma Samaj is always anxious to do its part, however small it may be, in times of famine or other troubles in any part of the country. A more important activity was in the field of education. Keshub felt the need of a better and more efficient system of education for the young, and for this purpose he even started some agitation in the country in 1861. Mr. Newman helped him in this work by way of creating a favourable public opinion in England also. Although there was no tangible result of this agitation, Keshub started a model school for boys where intellectual training might be combined with the moral. This school was opened in 1862 under the name of Calcutta College. In the previous year, the *Indian Mirror*, a fortnightly paper in English was started in order to create a healthy and sound public opinion in matters religious, social, educational and political.

This period with its varied activities, extending over four or five years, reached its climax when Devendranath appointed Keshub the Acharya of the Brahma Samaj, in the year 1862. During this time the relations between them had become closer than ever, and they stood to each other as father and son, *Guru* and *Shishya*, friend and friend. Of all men, the Maharshi had most truly understood Keshub, and had divined with the insight of love what wonderful depths there were in that youthful spirit. Pratap Chunder Moozumdar who came nearest to sharing this

relationship between Keshub and Devendra thus speaks of it in his *Life of Keshub* :

Who that had a stake in the Brahma Samaj could ever forget the singular relations of spiritual friendship that had slowly and unconsciously grown up between two men so differently constituted as Keshub Chunder Sen and Devendranath Tagore. In Keshub, as Devendranath subsequently expressed, he had found "the wealth of seven empires," he had found a genuine man of God, a friend of "undivided spirit." Many men he had seen, he had converted many idolaters into theists, but he had never yet met a man whose only delight lay in God. He, therefore, gave Keshub the surname of Brahmananda (Rejoicer in God). Keshub on the other hand found in him an affectionate response, a maturity of faith and love, which he had never met before. He found a father in God. He found a guardian, a friend, an instructor, a patron and guide...To the last day of his life his gratitude and honour for his benefactor were steady. In Devendra's prophetic eye Keshub centred in himself the whole hope and promise of the future Brahma Samaj, the ideal spirituality of the rising generation, the gifts and blessings of Providence to the land. Everything he did or said carried a good omen to Devendra's fatherly heart; every feature of his face and mind was a gleam of the Light Eternal to his imaginative trusting soul. Keshub's enthusiasm filled him with the electricity of the higher spheres, Keshub's sympathy intoxicated him, Keshub's intelligence deepened and confirmed his own wisdom, he found a perfect marvel of religious genius in Keshub Chunder Sen. This excessive regard annoyed many, and was looked upon as a sort of idolatry. Till past midnight the two often sat together, the mature man of fifty, and the young enthusiast of twenty-five and out-watched the whole company of attendant Brahmas. They sat together face to face, absorbed in the ecstasy of transcendent spiritual intercourse, drunk with mutual sympathy and communion.

This long quotation has its justification only in the fact that this relationship between Keshub and Devendra is one of the idylls not only of the Brahma Samaj but of the religious history of New Hindustan.

As for this appointment of Keshub as the Acharya, it was a two-fold departure on the part of the Brahma Samaj. Till now the Samaj had no Acharya but only Upacharyas, and the Maharshi himself was the President of the Samaj. Besides Keshub was a non-Brahmin by birth, and the pulpit was hitherto reserved for the Brahmins only. Added to this was the youth of Keshub. All this naturally looked very revolutionary to the older and more conservative members of the Samaj, but Devendranath had made up his mind and went on with his work. For so great an innovation on his part he gives the following reason:

I had pitched my tent at a place called Ghuskara, not far from Burdwan, in a mango grove, containing thousands of trees. It was about mid-day. And there the voice came to me saying "Appoint Keshub the Minister of the Brahma Samaj. The Samaj shall grow and prosper under him." I returned to Calcutta and determined to make the appointment. The elderly Brahmas entreated me not to do this. They said "Appoint him Upacharya,\* do not appoint him Acharya." Keshub Babu himself was not prepared for this honour. But the Voice of God came to me, I had received the inspiration, and I determined to act accordingly. Such leadings (*chalans*) I have often received in the career of the Brahma Samaj.

The ceremony of installation of Keshub as the Acharya was made a grand affair, and in order that it

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\* A preacher of the rank of one a degree lower than the minister.

might be so it was performed in the spacious courtyard of the Tagore family mansion. At the end of a long service Keshub was presented with the insignia of his office, "a sort of diploma,\* framed in gold, in which his main duties as Minister were set forth in beautiful language, the document being signed by Devendranath Tagore himself," along with a copy of the *Brahma Dharma Grantha* and an ivory seal. The title of Brahmanand was also conferred on him at this time. To quote Moozumdar again :

Thus was Keshub formally initiated into the duties of the Minister of the Brahma Samaj, an appointment regarded by him as most sacred and Divinely given, to which he faithfully clung all his life. As Minister, and nothing higher, he always wished to be recognised by the whole Indian Theistic community, taking upon himself spiritual responsibilities, and heavy ceaseless work, the burden of which, to the last day of his eventful life, he bore under every circumstance of trial and difficulty. He looked upon himself as the God-appointed shepherd of the sheep, and his spiritual leading he deeply wanted the whole Brahma Samaj, then a united Church, to take.

This appointment was a matter of very great rejoicing to the younger party which had now come to look upon Keshub as its leader and guide, and Devendranath fully shared their joy with them. From this time Devendranath came to be known as the *Pradhan Acharya* (The Chief Minister).

There was one incident, however, which marred the joy of the occasion. The day that saw Keshub thus installed as the minister saw him also ostracized from his family. All the religious and social reform work

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\* Moozumdar's Life of Keshub.



that Keshub had been doing must have alarmed them long since, and now things had gone too far to be tolerated any more. This ceremony was an act of committal to the cause of reform on the part of Keshub, and to aggravate his offence, he had taken his young wife to witness the ceremony against the wishes of all his family. His uncles, therefore, his father having died while he was a child, sent word to him at the Tagore's house that the family house was no more open to him. Upon this Devendranath only too gladly asked him to stay with him as long as he liked. Some months after there was a reconciliation between him and his family, but that took place only after Keshub had gone through a serious illness. A part of this time he stayed with his venerable patron and friend Devendranath, and their relations became closer than ever. As the immediate cause of this trouble was the fact that Keshub had dared to take his wife to a place and function where in the ordinary course of things a woman in her position would not go, the problem of woman's emancipation from the zenana and her education came in view before the Brahma Samaj.

Another and a much more serious result followed this appointment. Already there was growing a cleavage between the younger party and the older members of the Samaj, and it became now definite and pronounced. This step on the part of Devendranath was a clear sign to them which way the Samaj was turning, and so their hostility to Keshub and his friends became open and they lost no opportunity to discredit them in the eyes of the venerable leader. On the other side the "Progressive

Brahmas" as the younger party came to be called were not slow to give them cause for offence. They certainly went too fast and their methods of work were not free from a certain amount of violence. Drunk with the wine of ideas of individual liberty and freedom of conscience, they committed excess after excess in the name of religious reform. Keshub's own action of taking his wife to the Maharshi's house and especially the way in which he took her from his home against the remonstrations of a whole host of angry relatives who had collected on the spot, and very likely against the wishes of the young lady herself smacks of the violence which was characteristic of the party. We find the same again in his threatening his uncles with legal action if they did not give him his share of the ancestral property. And yet Keshub was only moderate when compared to some of his followers. In their zeal for reform they did not care whether the tender hearts of their dear and near ones were lacerated and wounded, or if time-worn and hoary prejudices of people round about them were violated. Without doing any injustice to them, we may well call them social revolutionaries. These men were the first fruits of English education in the land, and though they were very different from other educated people owing to their moral passion, everything old and orthodox was anathematized by them. All this gave an easy handle to the older party and they made full use of it. But these developments did not take place at once.

Meantime, Keshub's ministry was not spiritually successful. The great and wonderful change that came over him only a few years after and made him a *Bhakta*,

a devotee, could not be even dreamt of in these days. He had great ethical earnestness but no tenderness of feeling or sentiment. Thus his ministrations were characterized by a dryness which must have looked aggravating in its sad contrast to the deep fervour of Devendranath's devotions. The older members did not take any pains to hide their dissatisfaction at this, but Keshub himself was dissatisfied the most. He even thought of resigning his office as the minister. But it was only the unfailing encouragement of Devendranath that kept him to his post, and this was one more cause that bound him to his old friend with the ties of gratitude and affection.

Not only this. Devendranath appointed two Upacharyas from among the Progressive Party, both of these being men who had discarded their sacred thread. This gave further cause for complaint on the part of the older members, because in order to make room for these the two previous Upacharyas had to be deposed for the sole reason that they had kept their thread on. Besides, Keshub was appointed the Secretary, and Pratap Chunder Moozamdar, a near relative and friend of Keshub, the Assistant Secretary of the Samaj. The latter was also made the editor of the *Tattwabodhini Patrica*. Devendranath rightly felt that these were the proper persons to guide the affairs of the Samaj, and accordingly he made these arrangements, although they gave much offence to several people. All this together with the new social ideals that were coming to the front made some of the older men retire altogether from the Samaj, and they formed an *Upasana Samaj*, an association for prayer and worship.

All this while the expansion of the Samaj was going on. In 1863, a "Society of Theistic Friends" was started with the object of promoting religious and general culture among people. One of its most important works was to spread education among the *purdah* women by means of classes and examinations. One of its members started a monthly magazine for women called *Bamabodhini*, Woman's Instructor, a magazine which has continued to live till now.

It was also in this year that Keshub carried on a controversy with some Christian missionaries, an event which made him and the Brahma Samaj more popular than ever. He had already had a controversy with one Mr. Dyson, a missionary at Krishnagar in 1861, and this was with the Rev. Lal Behari Dey of Calcutta, a man well-known as a writer and speaker. In both cases the Christians had taken the aggressive, and it was probably with a pang of heart that Keshub entered into this theological warfare. However, having entered into it he carried it through, without being in the least disrespectful to Christ. He made the position of the Brahma Samaj clear to a large audience in a lecture entitled "The Brahma Samaj Vindicated". Dr. Duff was so much impressed by it that he is reported to have said: "The Brahma Samaj is a power in the realm." Naturally this fortified the position of the heterodox body in the eyes of the public, and even the orthodox people began to tolerate it for its successful opposition to Christianity, if for nothing else.

But the most important activity of Keshub and his friends at this time was in the field of missionary work.

Bijay Krishna Goswami, one of the new Upacharyas and at the same time one of the most enthusiastic men of the Progressive Party, went out in response to an invitation from a community that had been excommunicated some generations back, in the Jessore district. He created great interest by his fiery enthusiasm, and initiated no less than twenty-three families in the Brahma Dharma. Aghorenath Gupta, a most sincere and selfless member of the same band was posted at Dacca, where he deeply influenced several young men. One of these was Banga Chunder Roy who became in course of time a well-known missionary of the Brahma Samaj and then of the Nava Vidhan. Keshub and Bijay visited the place and created much enthusiasm among the people and especially the young. The new leaven had begun to work and its effects were visible everywhere. Many a thirsty spirit was panting after the waters of a pure religion under the influence of English education and Christian ideas, and these found in the Brahma Dharma just what satisfied their intellect as well as their heart.

During the course of the year 1864, Keshub made an extensive tour for the same purpose, going as far as Bombay in the West and Madras in the South. This was the first time that the message of the Brahma Dharma was carried out of Bengal, and wherever Keshub went he created a profound impression by his great eloquence and magnetic personality. He saw signs of new life and thought, especially in big cities and towns, where people had come in contact with Western ideas, and where the English education had begun to broaden the outlook of the people. He saw that a New Hindustan was being

created wherein the distinctions and differences of caste and community and creed were bound to vanish with the progress of time. He also felt that it was for the Brahma Samaj to do this work in the right manner, and accordingly came to conceive the idea of an all-India mission of the Brahma Samaj. It was as a result of this visit that a Ved Samaj was established in Madras, and in Bombay steps were taken which led to the establishment of the Prarthana Samaj a few years later.

On his return to Calcutta, Keshub found things quite different from what they were when he had left. During his absence the older members had the ear of Devendra entirely to themselves, and they made the most of the opportunity. Besides the young Progressive members had added fuel to the fire by their indiscretion and rashness. They had brought about an inter-marriage, the second one of its kind in the Samaj, which was at the same time a widow remarriage between parties which were not very respectable. All this was too much for the orthodox sensitiveness of the older members and for even the Pradhan Acharya who had so long tolerated and sympathized with the young radicals. The secret uneasiness and misgivings which he had been feeling for some time increased; and he felt that he had gone too far. On seeing that a crisis was impending, Keshub made an attempt to establish a *Brahma Pratinidhi Sabha*, a Representative Assembly of not only the Brahmas of Calcutta but of other places and parts of the country as well for deciding important questions concerning the Samaj. But this could not be done at once, and meantime the situation was growing worse. It was at about the

end of the year 1864 that Devendra took a definite step which led ultimately to the final separation. He reinstalled on the pulpit one day the two Upacharyas who had been deposed for keeping their thread on in place of the other two belonging to the Progressive Party for the purpose of conducting the usual weekly worship. This was done without any formal appointment, and when it was protested against, Devendranath replied that as the service was held in his house, an event due to the Samaj house being damaged in a cyclone, he was at liberty to do what he liked. At this though Keshub remained for the purpose of worship, the others led by Bijay Krishna Goswamy left and held the usual service elsewhere. To them such a step on the part of Devendranath was not only irregular and autocratic, but it involved the violation of a principle which they held most sacred and for which they had made immense sacrifices. This was the beginning of the schism.

The next step that Devendranath took was to remove the members of the younger party from all the important offices of the Samaj. He appointed a new Secretary and an Assistant Secretary in place of Keshub and Pratap, a new managing committee which had no members from the Progressive Party, and a new editor of the Tattwabodhini Patrica instead of Pratap. He did all this by virtue of his power as the sole Trustee of the Samaj. Evidently his idea was to put down the Progressive Party with a high hand, or to throw it out of the Samaj altogether. These steps virtually took back the Brahma Samaj to what it was before Keshub had joined it in the fifties. They did not seem to recognise any

of those developments, in principle as well as practice, which had taken place since, and in which Devendranath had so whole-heartedly participated. It was impossible that Keshub and his friends, who had been committed to the new course by their uncompromising fidelity to the moral and religious principles they held most dear and for which they had left their all, kith and kin as well as worldly prosperity and honour, should acquiesce in any of these things. They were men fired with apostolic zeal and they felt that they were in the right. Keshub, in spite of all this, did not want to proceed to extremes and he tried his utmost to avoid an open schism. While protesting against all these acts of Devendranath, he proposed that the progressive party should be allowed to hold a service of their own on a separate day. To this Devendra would not consent, but he offered the pulpit to the threadless Upacharyas once a month in course of the regular worship of the Samaj. This was not acceptable to Keshub and his party inasmuch as it involved a sort of compromise on their part in regard to the question of the sacred thread. Keshub tried to bring the two parties together in the anniversary of the year 1865 but in vain. In the month of February 1865, a general meeting of the Brahmas was called with the object of settling the affairs of the Samaj in a constitutional manner. It condemned the action of Devendranath and wisely proceeded to divide the affairs of the Samaj into I the management of the Trust property, and II the management of the Missionary work of the Samaj. It took under its charge the latter work which had been done hitherto mainly by the Progressive



Party, and appointed office-bearers. Instead of the *Tattwabodhini Patrica* which was taken away from the hands of this party, a paper called the *Dharma Tattwa* was started, and in course of time the *Indian Mirror* also came to be published under its auspices. This last was virtually Keshub's paper, for it was started by him and had become a power solely due to his efforts. Devendranath tried to take away this paper too from Keshub's hands, but the latter brought out an extraordinary number of it and from that time it remained his. Devendranath started another called the *National Paper*.

But above all, Keshub and his fellow-workers concentrated their attention on the Mission-work of the Samaj. They felt this to be their special vocation, and it was growing day by day. They knew their strength and they utilized it to the fullest extent; rather they were possessed with a power from on high which made them suffer and do things which ordinary men could not have done. These men were actuated by the truest principles of *Satyagraha* which have guided any band of men in New Hindustan. They sacrificed everything in order to follow these principles, left home and all and they were not always sure of their daily bread even. Their sacrifices and sufferings are without a parallel among any of the religious or other movements that have come after the Brahma Samaj. Under the influence of these men, many a young man gave up idolatry and caste welcoming even persecution of a severe kind which soon followed. The Brahma Samajes began to multiply and the membership increased by

leaps and bounds. The new idealism or rather power, the effects of which were manifest on all sides, found a most fitting expression in a remarkable little book called "True Faith" which Keshub wrote in one of his mission tours. It was the summing up of the new religion in as succinct a form as possible, and the book is surcharged with an energy and power, which even to-day does not fail to make a deep impression. The book was meant to be a "guide to the Missionaries," but was a veritable gospel to them as well as to the majority of the Brahmas. It was full of apostolic zeal, and laid down apostolic standards for all those who would follow the new path.

Another important institution that was established during this period of stress and conflict was the Brahmica Samaj, a Theistic organization for women. Its object was to give general and especially religious instruction to women. Many of the young men who had joined the Samaj and more particularly the missionaries had been excommunicated from their communities, and the wives of many of them had chosen to follow their husbands on this thorny path. It was the instinct of Hindu womanhood, the supreme example of which is Seeta the wife of Rama, that had impelled them to do this. Besides, the influence of English education had already set the current in the direction of the emancipation of women, at least in thought, and here was an opportunity to help them to be true companions to their husbands. Thus woman's true position came to be recognized in the Brahma Samaj, and though in course of time serious

differences arose between the members of the Progressive Party themselves in regard to this question, at this time all worked together for this cause. Strictest *pardah* was observed then among women of upper classes in Bengal, a state of things even now largely prevailing there, and it was from this that women had to be taken out and made familiar with the new ways of life. Keshub took the lead in the matter, and it was due to these efforts made by him and his followers that the women of the Brahma Samaj were for a long time the leaders of the new womanhood of the country.

Meantime, the differences between the two parties in the Samaj were coming to a head. Keshub's proposal for allowing his party to have a separate day for worship was thus replied to by Devendranath :

You have written that by this measure both parties may be served, and in the place of difference that has sprung up between the Brahmas, good feeling is likely to be engendered. It is my firm belief that from this measure greater mischief is likely to proceed, and in a public Brahma Samaj it was not proper.

This made the complete severance inevitable. It must be said to the credit of Keshub, however, that he did his utmost to avoid an open schism with the parent Samaj. He seems to have been actuated all the while by a very high sense of the mission of the Brahma Samaj, as well as by the sense of his own responsibility to the Samaj, to his Country and God. It is a pleasure to read the following quotations from two such eminent authorities as Pratap Chunder Moozamdar and Satyendranath

Tagore. Though belonging to opposite parties, both of them agree in the main in their judgment on the situation. The former in his *Life of Keshub* says :

He (Keshub) proposed a separate day of public worship in the Samaj building, apart from the usual Wednesday service, for himself and his friends. He repeatedly endeavoured to arrange united festivals during the anniversary. But to no purpose. Devendra had finally made up his mind, and was inexorable. He feared that any continuance of relations with these young firebrands would lead to endless troubles in future. The secession alone would solve the difficulty. Retiring with his friends from the Adi Samaj, then called the Calcutta Brahma Samaj, Keshub never suffered for a day his reverence and affection for Pradhan Acharya Devendranath Tagore to abate. The official and private correspondence he conducted was firm, sometimes strongly worded, but his personal attitude to his venerable friend was submissive in the extreme. Be it said also that Devendranath Tagore never lost his interest in his young friends, and never ceased to be anxious about their spiritual progress.

This is what Satyendranath says in his introduction to the English translation of Maharshi's *Auto-biography*:

For some time proposals for separate services in the same church were discussed, but with no result. A complete severance seemed to be the only solution. Some of the young men broke away, but Keshub held on for some time longer. The mutual love between the Pradhan Acharya and Brahmananda delayed the catastrophe. But as no compromise was possible between the two, separation was inevitable.

He adds :

But while working for his own church with indefatigable zeal and unflinching devotion, Keshub, it is a pleasure to note, was nowise unmindful of the debt of gratitude to the Adi Samaj, and was always anxious to establish a *modus vivendi* between the two churches. He even drew up a scheme with that object, and submitted it to my father for approval, but somehow all his efforts in that direction fell through. Nevertheless he continued to cherish the utmost reverence and regard for my father, and the latter treated him with paternal affection to the last. The schism in the Brahma Samaj made no difference in their mutual friendly relations.

With the secession the Calcutta Brahma Samaj practically came to an end. Maharshi Devendranath wanted to take it back to its old condition, and for this purpose even changed its name into the *Adi Brahma Samaj*, the Original Brahma Samaj, as distinguished from the new Brahma Samaj that soon came into existence. By doing this his idea was to keep the Brahma Dharma as pure as possible, both religiously and socially, *i. e.* strictly within the limits of Hindu scriptures and *Varnashram*.

As for the progress made by the Samaj under the joint leadership of Devendra and Keshub during less than a decade, it was remarkable in comparison with what had been achieved before. By the beginning of the year 1866, the number of Samajes had risen to fifty-four, and nearly half of these had come into existence in this period. Besides, there were several schools for boys and girls conducted by Brahmas in various parts of Bengal, and no less than thirty-seven periodicals had

come into existence for the propagation of the ideals, religious and social, of the Samaj. The light had already travelled out of Bengal, and some of these fifty-four Samajes were in different parts of Hindustan such as the Punjab and Madras. The centre of all this work lay in the missionary body which had ten members, and all of them had performed and were daily performing the *Vishwa-Jit Yagna*, the world-conquering sacrifice. These men and the work done by them in the majority of the Samajes passed over into the new Samaj that now came into being.

The true cause of the separation between Devendra and Keshub was deeper than what appeared on the surface. In fact it went as deep as the roots of the difference between the old and the new world in Hindustan. If there is any single event which has been more than others the cause of ushering in the New Hindustan in which we live to-day, it is this secession. In spite of all the similarity of spiritual life or their deep love for God, there was a world of difference between these two men, Devendra and Keshub. While the Maharshi's type of spirituality was static, Keshub's was dynamic. Devendra was an out and out aristocrat whereas Keshub was a democrat : Devendra was a *Rishi* while Keshub was a *Bhakta*. The present writer remembers being told by no less a man than Pundit Shivrath Shastri that even he in those early days found it difficult to approach the Maharshi. Keshub was entirely different. He was easily accessible to the poorest : he even delighted to be in their company and these were his chief companions all his life. He made a religion of hero-worship, while

in the case of Devendra such worship is conspicuous by its entire absence. This difference between the temperaments and characters of Devendra and Keshub has been attributed to, not without reason, the latter having drawn much of his inspiration from the Life and Teachings of Christ, but it had also something to do with his Vaishnava origin. Regarding the causes of this separation, the following from the pen of Satyendranath Tagore might well be given here :

<sup>1</sup>Keshub, on the other hand, was a reformer of the more pronounced type. Though for many years he had sat at the feet of the Maharshi, a time came when he could no longer pull together with his conservatism. Intermarriage, remarriage of widows, abolition of caste distinctions, all these questions of radical reform were started and discussed. On these questions, it would seem, my father yielded as far as his conservatism would permit, but when he thought that Keshub's disciples were going too far he drew back in alarm. Then, again, there were other differences between the two. My father, as I have said, was intensely national in his religious ideal, whereas Keshub's outlook was more cosmopolitan. While not exactly denationalized, he was better fitted by his training and education to assimilate the ideas and civilization of the West. Indeed, his whole character was moulded by Western culture and Christian influences. He drew much of his spiritual fare from the New Testament, and habitually spoke of Jesus Christ in a manner which made his missionary friends cling to the hope of his conversion to their faith. A struggle between two such temperaments and such opposite ideals was bound to end in disruption, and matters soon came to a crisis.

It was on the question of caste and on that of catholicity of faith, though this latter was more latent than patent at first, that the Brahma Samaj came to be divided at this time. The fact is that the Theism of the Samaj was getting more concrete owing to this Christian influence, and the Samaj was beginning to realize more than ever the two cardinal principles of Christian Theism as distinguished from Christianity proper, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. God was not to be worshipped merely in nature or in self, but in Prophets and Great Men, living centres of Humanity, and in the Church growing around them. Thus the idea of a living Church took possession of the new band, and though they had yet many a lesson to learn in regard to the differences between a Church and a Community, it was a sense of Brotherhood which made them do away with distinctions of caste and creed. It was this concrete Theism which gave the Brahma Samaj the power and position it came to have in course of time.



## Chapter VI

## THE BHARATVARSHIYA BRAHMA SAMAJ

After the last hope of union with the Calcutta Samaj was given up, a general meeting of the Brahmas was held on the 11th November 1866. It was in this meeting that the *Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj* or the *Brahma Samaj of India* was formally established, though not without some opposition from a few members of the old Samaj. Along with this, several resolutions were passed, two of which deserve special notice. One was for the compilation of such moral and religious precepts, as were consistent with the Theism of the Brahma Samaj from all the Scriptures of the world, and the other for the presentation of a parting address\* to the Pradhan Acharya for the great services he had rendered to the cause of the Brahma Samaj. This last was considered very necessary in view of the deep debt of gratitude which they owed to him for his teachings. The aim of the new body was thus described by Keshub in his introductory speech :—

To unite all such Brahmas and form them into a body, to bring their individual and collective labours in a vast but well-organized system of unity and co-operation: this is all that is sought to be accomplished at the present meeting. Professing a common faith, it is our duty to combine for the common good, and not to remain isolated and be regardless of each other. We must endeavour to realize so far as lies in our power the True Ideal of the Church of God, we must form a truly Theistic Brotherhood, a Family of God's children, of which he is the common father and head, that Holy Kingdom of which he is the Eternal King.

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\* It was in this that Devendranath Tagore was first addressed as the Maharshi.

Thus was ushered into existence the *Bharat Varshiya Brahma Samaj* as a National Church with a faith that was frankly eclectic. This Eclecticism showed itself prominently in two lectures which Keshub had given a few months before this formal establishment. The first was "Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia." The immediate cause of this lecture was the strained relationship that had then come to exist between the English people and the people of the land, but there is no doubt that the subject had been for some time in Keshub's mind, and he wanted to give expression to it when a suitable occasion came. It has been already said that he was influenced very much by the Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ, and this is fully corroborated by the lecture. In it, however, he studiously avoids all the peculiar dogmas of Christianity, only holding forth Jesus Christ as the supreme example of moral perfection and self-sacrifice. He declared Christ to be "above ordinary humanity," but there he stopped without referring to his divinity. The most significant part of the lecture is found in these words :

In Christ we see not only the exaltedness of humanity, but also the grandeur of which Asiatic nature is susceptible. The more this fact is pondered, the less I hope will be the antipathy and hatred of European Christians against Oriental nationalities, and the greater the interest of the Asiatics in the teachings of Christ.

This was the practical side of the moral and religious ideal he set forth therein, and it was on this ground that he not only based his hopes but worked all his life for the ultimate union of Hindustan and

England, the East and the West, and in the last years of his life for the union of the best elements of Hinduism and Christianity. This came to be in course of time the most original part of his teaching and it made him not only the greatest Hindu but the greatest Oriental of his time. As for the lecture, though it marked him out as an orator of remarkable power and a religious thinker of an original type, its immediate effects were not very agreeable. The people in general thought that Keshub was on the way to becoming a Christian and Christian missionaries too were not without hopes of his conversion. But this had no foundation in fact. The members of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj naturally thought that the true cause of the differences between the old and the young party was now manifesting itself, and they congratulated themselves that they were well rid of Keshub and his party in time. Thus misrepresentations on all sides were so serious that Keshub had to make his position clear by giving another lecture on "Great Men," a few months after. In this he spoke of the place and work of these in the economy of Providence for the salvation of mankind. Though he therein referred to Jesus Christ as "the Prince of Prophets," he said that every one of those men who are known as Incarnations, Prophets, Heroes, Great Men, Representative Men etc., has a place of his own for which he ought to be honoured and revered. Incidentally he explains the Christo—centric character of this Divine Economy in these words :

And though Jesus Christ, the Prince of Prophets, effected greater wonders and did infinitely more good to the

world than the others, and deserves therefore our profoundest reverence, we must not neglect that chain or any single link in that chain of prophets that preceded him and prepared the world for him : nor must we refuse honour to those who coming after him have carried on the blessed work of human regeneration for which he lived and died.

The result of this lecture was not to make things easy. It made the Brahmas of the old school more suspicious than ever on account of the doctrine of hero-worship promulgated therein, and many of the Christian missionaries looked upon it as a sort of recantation. From this time Keshub gave no more explanations of any kind, and for a long time kept silence over those problems concerning the nature, work and place of great men in general and of Christ Jesus in particular. However, this new feature of hero-worship came to be added so early as this to the faith of the new Samaj, and that along with its catholicity made the difference between it and the Brahma Dharma of Maharshi Devendranath. It has been already said that the latter was insensible to the meaning of greatness in man. In this he was poles apart from Keshub. To him the claim made by any human being, however great, to be divinely inspired was so much robbery on his part of the glory of God. One looks in vain in his remarkable *Autobiography* for any recognition whatever, much less enthusiastic admiration, of any form of human greatness. Neither Buddha nor Shankar, nor Moses nor Mohammad nor Christ awakens in him any enthusiasm. Rather he is positively repelled by some of them, this repulsion being proportionate to the claim made on

behalf of them. This was most so in the case of Jesus Christ. In this, therefore, he was singularly unlike both his predecessor and successor, Ram Mohan and Keshub, to both of whom all forms of greatness appealed, and spiritual greatness most of all. It was the element of hero-worship that was now added to the Theism of the old school, and it was largely that which made many of these young men heroes and martyrs. They had already conceived a profound admiration and love for the teachings and character of Jesus Christ, and some of them had gone far into personal relationship with him. To this now they added a warm love for Chaitanya, their own national or rather provincial teacher. They had already incorporated a part of the teachings of Christianity in the book called "True Faith," which was a sort of gospel to the new band. This little book was written largely from the plan of the precepts and example of Jesus himself. A year or two later some of the characteristic doctrines of *Bhakti* were taken from the teachings and life of Chaitanya. It was no wonder that the new faith under these influences began to spread rapidly.

Pandit Shivnath Shastri after mentioning two of the characteristics of the new religious life, "the sense of sin and the spirit of prayer," which he regards as the distinctive contribution of the Christian spirit prevalent among the Brahmas at this time, says :

The infusion of the Christian spirit brought into the field another characteristic Christian sentiment, namely, an enthusiasm for saving fellow-sinners by carrying to them the new Gospel.....From the day of the formation of their party, the

progressive Brahmas, in proportion to the infusion of the Christian spirit, began to manifest enthusiasm for mission-work. This became visible from 1861 when Mr. Sen resigned his secular employment in the Bank of Bengal and showed the way of apostolical missionary life. His example was soon followed by others, as has been already narrated. The little missionary body went on slowly increasing in the face of great privations.....Indeed it was a new experience in the Brahma life. The spirit of utter self-surrender in which the new missionaries took up their work after the schism was a wonder to all. Many of them had given up comfortable situations to be able to devote themselves wholly to their Church. From comfort and ease they had come down to abject poverty. Up to that time there was no organization, no mission-fund, no reproductive work.....The remark that Jesus once made with regard to himself, viz., "The foxes have holes and birds have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head," literally applied to them at that time.....At times their privations were very great. For months many of them went without shoes, walking bare-footed in the streets of Calcutta, and the days were not few when their provisions failed altogether and they had to starve. Yet they were cheerful, contented and happy. Amongst the new principles imbibed from the study of the life of Christ was one "Take no thought for the morrow" which they wanted to carry literally into practice. Their great self-abnegation excited the admiration of even those who were least favourable to the Brahma Samaj. Their young wives, most of them below twenty, touched by the new enthusiasm, shared in all their privations with a cheerful alacrity. The memory of those days will ever remain in our minds as a truly apostolic period of Brahma history.

In spite of these sufferings, more young men joined the missionary band in the beginning of the year 1867, and their number came to be over a dozen. It is

a fact worth noticing that it was only during these years that several men came forward to serve as missionaries. During later times accession to the ranks of missionaries was only by ones or twos at the most. Both Bijay Krishna Goswami and Aghorenath Gupta, accompanied by one more, went to Eastern Bengal where a new field was opening before them. Keshub himself went with some to the north as far as the Punjab. Wherever they went, new interest was created and Samajes sprang forth. However, all missionary work and the success which attended it were hardly sufficient to keep up their spirits amidst the trials and temptations to which they were exposed, and many of them including Keshub became a prey to a haunting sense of sin and desolation. Providence had something better in store for them, for they had suffered for their faith like martyrs, and they were to be lifted up to a higher level of spiritual life. This gift of God came to them in the shape of a daily divine service which Keshub began to hold in his house from the month of August 1867, where most of these young men, particularly the missionaries, congregated and got their daily divine sustenance. Keshub's own nature under all this stress of strained relationship with the older party, unpopularity, persecution and the overwhelming sense of the great responsibility that had thus been thrown upon him, underwent a change that was little less than marvellous. All that lack of tenderness of feeling and sentiment, which had made his ministrations to his flock in the old Samaj anything but agreeable was more than supplied by the welling up of devotional feeling that came to him. He poured

out profoundly touching and stirring prayers and the atmosphere changed from one of dryness and desolation to one of great sweetness. It was the overflow of that peculiar form of devotion known as *Bhakti* and before they were conscious of the fact it had taken possession of them.

In course of time this change came to be accompanied by all those features which are characteristic of the Vaishnava piety. The well-known instruments of *Khole*,<sup>1</sup> *Kartal*<sup>2</sup> and *Ektara*<sup>3</sup> were introduced, and enthusiastic singing, dancing, shedding tears of penitence and joy, all these became familiar features of Brahma devotions. All these things developed easily into the *Sankirtan*, that long musical celebration in which all these are included and the devotional feeling moves over the widest range. Pratap Chunder Moozamdar in his *Life of Keshub* thus describes this new development :

A new epoch dawned upon the Brahma Samaj with the introduction of Brahma Sankirtan. It meant the opening up of a new world of religious feeling, it laid the foundation of a new spiritual relationship with the most popular of the recent prophets of India, the apostle of Bhakti, namely, Chaitanya. Thus Keshub stood at the threshold of his independent career with the shadow of Jesus on the one hand, and the shadow of Chaitanya on the other.

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1 This is a long earthen drum : 2 brass cymbals : 3 harp with one string. These instruments are used generally by the Vaishnavas and they create much enthusiasm and emotional excitement. In large congregations many of these instruments are used at the same time.



In all this devotional development, Keshub was helped a great deal by Bijay Krishna Goswami, who was a lineal descendant of no less a person than Adwaita, one of the foremost disciples of Chaitanya. Another person, Trailokyanath Sanyal, who joined the missionary body in 1867, was also of much help from the first. He had an extremely sweet voice and wonderful powers of ready composition. No sooner were adorations made, or prayers offered, or sermons given by Keshub than new hymns in new tunes, suitable to the occasion, would spontaneously rise from his finely-strung spirit which was waiting like a lyre ready for the touch of the master. All this culminated in the *Brahmotsab*, the Brahma festival, held in November 1867. It was a whole-day celebration in which from morning till late at night the congregation sat on through a series of services, prayers, readings from Scriptures, Sankirtans etc., with only a few short intervals between. Devendranath was invited to conduct the evening service on this day, and it must have been indeed a joyful surprise to him to have seen the youthful band of social revolutionaries turned so soon into enthusiastic devotees. The great joy and spiritual benefit derived from this *Utsab* made such whole-day celebrations a common feature of the anniversary festivals since that time. The element of *Bhakti*, which thus fructified in such a short time became also a most potent means for missionary work, and henceforth the religion of the Samaj was within easy reach of the common people and women. The form of divine service also underwent a wholesome change in the same direction, a simple and spontaneous

expression of the feelings of the heart in the vernacular taking the place of most of the Sanskrit texts in the old form. To all this came to be added in course of time the *Nagar Sankirtan*, the singing procession through the city which was a devotional festival in itself. It also helped in the spread of the cause. It was thus that the *Bhakti* movement began in the Brahma Samaj. These things are common to-day among all classes of people, but in those days cultured and refined people looked down upon them with contempt, and even the members of the Adi Brahm Samaj including Devendranath were scandalized when the first *Nagar Sankirtan* took place. It was Keshub's genius, aided by the fiery enthusiasm of Bijay Krishna Goswami, that rescued these powerful means of *Bhakti*, and introduced this new movement in the Samaj.

The year 1868 opened with much promise for the new Samaj. Ever since the separation, Keshub and his companions were in great need of a place of worship. They used to meet for this purpose in the building of the Calcutta School or in other places. Keshub had been all the while trying to have a separate place, and failing other means he even borrowed money on his own responsibility and bought a suitable plot of ground in the Machhua Bazaar Street. On the 24th January, the anniversary of the Brahma Samaj, the foundation of a *Mandir* (temple) was laid in the midst of a whole-day festival. In the evening Keshub gave his lecture on "Regenerating Faith" to a very large audience including in itself eminent men and no less a person than the Viceroy, Lord Lawrence himself. In

this lecture Keshub embodied some of the new ideas of *Bhakti* and Divine Grace which he and his friends had come to learn and experience during the last few months. The lecture is remarkable and is supplementary in some respects to his tract on "True Faith." It was from this year that Keshub made it almost a regular practice to give those annual orations which drew thousands, and wherein he made a kind of public confession of the faith and practice of his Church. These addresses form very inspiring reading even to-day and the lives of many a man have been changed by them.

In the beginning of the spring of the same year, Keshub went for mission work to the United Provinces and even as far as Bombay. In this last place the Prarthana Samaj had been established in the preceding year. While out for this work, he had left his family on the way at Mongyr, a place situated on the confines of the province of Behar and he himself off and on stayed there. There were a large number of Bengali clerks here serving in the Railway works at that time, and among them there took place a revival, the like of which has never been seen in the whole history of the Brahma Samaj. These men, who were mostly young, readily responded to what little was done among them at first, and gradually by means of the divine services, prayers, sermons, lectures, Brahmotsavs, Sankirtans etc., the enthusiasm grew to an extraordinary pitch. This revival was indeed like one of those usually associated with the name of Chaitanya. It was an overflow of *Bhakti* in which people manifested their love for God as well as for one another. But this *Bhakti* became centred in

Keshub, and outwardly many of them began to call him master, lord, saviour and by such other names. This was altogether a new thing, and they all including Keshub must have been taken by surprise, not knowing what to do. But on this continuing for some time, there arose, as was natural, a serious agitation, led by Bijay Krishna Goswami and another missionary against this "man-worship" as it was called, and both Keshub and these 'worshippers of his' came in for a good deal of criticism. Keshub replied that he did not approve of such worship, but that he had "no right to interfere with the freedom of others." He said further: "It has ever been against my taste and conviction to bring men to do what I like by command or entreaties."

The result of all this episode, however, was that a few people left the Brahma Samaj altogether, and though Bijay Krishna publicly recanted his protest, the other missionary separated himself from Keshub. A much more serious consequence, however, was that from this time the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj was divided into two parties, though it was not quite conscious of the fact in the beginning. In the words of Pratap one of them "honoured Keshub almost to the point of worship and the other consistently undervalued him, suspected his principles, and denied him his true position. Of these two parties Keshub unreservedly preferred and trusted the former. The latter he was strongly inclined to accuse of rationalism and infidelity." The seed of the second schism was sown at this time, though probably no one then thought of it. The doctrine of Hero-worship which Keshub had promulgated

two years back became a live fact now in the Samaj itself, and Keshub began to be looked upon as a Great Man. This phenomenon was no other than the well-known one in the Hindu religious world *viz.*, *Guruism*, with this difference, however, that in the absence of any certain and authoritative faith and belief it was bound to have that experimental character which every thing in the Brahma Samaj bore. In his *History of the Brahma Samaj*, Pundit Shrivnath Shastri says that Keshub was asked by several people as to why he like the Christian apostles, notably St. Paul, did not tear his garment and say, "Rise up, I am also a man." But those who asked that question probably forgot that the Brahma Samaj was more a Hindu body than a Christian Church, and the Brahma Samaj had yet to know, if ever at all, its proper attitude to all such problems and questions.

This year there began another development of far-reaching consequences to the cause of the Brahma Samaj as a socio-religious community. Since 1862 when the first intermarriage in the Brahma Samaj took place, Keshub had rightly felt a misgiving as to the validity of such marriages. He had repeatedly asked Devendranath to seek legal advice, but the latter was never enthusiastic about the matter. There were more such marriages after the separation from the parent Samaj, and Keshub felt the paramount need of getting them recognised as valid. This could be done only by a new measure of law. Thus immediate action was necessary if the new Samaj was to make any headway in matters of social reform which had come to be recognised as an integral part of the movement. Hence Keshub

set about it earnestly. He had been already known to the Viceroy who had begun to take a personal interest in him and his movement ever since he gave his lecture "Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia." The Viceroy viewed the proposed reform with sympathy and invited Keshub to Simla for further discussion. Keshub went there this year, and the result of his conferences with the Viceroy and the officials was embodied in a Marriage Bill that was introduced in the Viceroy's Council the same year. This Bill was not passed, but a good beginning was made and that was a cause of rejoicing to Keshub and his friends.

Thus within only a couple of years the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj presented an appearance of a flourishing Church and a reformed Community with much promise for the future.

By the beginning of the year 1869, much of the agitation consequent upon the happenings at Mongyr had subsided, and things had assumed more or less a normal course. The new Mandir was being built fast, and some money was raised for it by subscription. Though this place was not ready, it was there that the anniversary service was held with great enthusiasm. On this occasion Keshub gave his annual address on '*The Future Church*', wherein he spoke of its creed as "the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man," and its gospel to be "the parable of the Prodigal Son, unsurpassed in the literature of Divine grace." He spoke of this Church as the one in which the prevailing religions of the land, Hinduism and Mohammedanism, would coalesce and form one religion under the guiding

influence of Christianity. This Church he expected to be the true foundation for a real and lasting Hindu-Moslem Unity.

An important missionary operation of this year was the one undertaken by three missionaries sent in response to a call from Mangalore on the Western Coast. As a result of their efforts a Brahma Samaj was established, and it has done a real service to the people there.

Meantime the Mandir in Calcutta was getting ready, and it was formally opened on the 22nd of August 1869, with all due solemnity, a day which has since been held sacred in this branch of the Brahma Samaj. The declaration of principles made on this occasion was on the lines laid down by Ram Mohan Roy in the Trust-Deed of the Brahma Sabha. Most of the negative clauses of the latter were there, while there is this positive statement, which is probably new :

This building is established with the object of paying reverence to all truths that exist in the world. This temple is founded with the object that all quarrel, all misunderstanding may be removed for ever, and all brotherly feeling may be perpetuated.

The special feature of the day, however, was the public initiation of not less than twenty-one young men, some of them the very cream of the rising generation such as Anand Mohan Bose, Krishna Behari Sen, Shivanth Shastri etc., into the new faith. Thus besides getting a local habitation, the new Samaj had succeeded in capturing some of the best minds in Calcutta. Several of these attained to great prominence in course of time.

At the end of the year Keshub went to Dacca where also a number of people accepted the new faith. All this naturally aroused much antagonism among the orthodox people, but it awakened at the same time much sympathy in the minds of liberal people in both England and America.

At this stage Keshub thought that the time had come for a visit on his part to England, which idea he had cherished long since. He had already made several friends with whom he had been corresponding for some years, and they had been inviting him to England for some time past. Also his fame as a great religious teacher had reached England, and he wanted to learn as well as to teach. He gave a preliminary lecture on "England and India" wherein he professed his desire to go to England as a learner. The Brahma Samaj he left in charge of Pratap Chunder Moozomdar, handing over to him the insignia of his office he had received from the Maharshi. He held repeated conferences with the Brahma missionaries and others wherein he tried to explain to them the various principles in regard to which serious differences had come to exist among them, and tried to show how far unity was possible among them in spite of these. He left for England in the month of February 1870.

His English visit was one continuous triumph. It is doubtful if any one from this country has ever received in England the welcome that Keshub did. From Queen Victoria down to the commonest man, the people there delighted to do honour to him, and his eloquence attracted universal attention. The various



denominations forgot for the moment their differences and were united on a common platform for the purpose of giving him a warm welcome. One of his important lectures there was "England's Duties to India" and it was the cause of stumbling to many an Englishman in India for the free criticism he made therein of the treatment given by these to the people of the land. But it was the furtherance of the cause of Social Reform and the Brahma Samaj in Hindustan that engaged chiefly his attention while there. With the help of Miss Mary Carpenter, the National Indian Association was formed for the purpose of bringing both the East and the West, Hindustan and England, close together. This institution has done much useful work during all these years, and it is still living. He started a sort of Theistic organization to bring the theists of Hindustan and England close together but this did not thrive. The most valuable of all his work, however, was the making of several friendships with such people as Dean Stanley, Max Muller, Miss Collet etc. The sympathies of most of these remained with him and his cause to the last, and that proved of great help to the Brahma Samaj. Of these, the last named lady had already been interested in the Brahma Samaj, but her interest became now much greater, and she did more than any one else to awaken the interest of the British people in the new movement by her writings and Brahma Year Books. Though she was strictly orthodox in her Christian belief, to her the Brahma Samaj was as it were her own, and she was very enthusiastic over everything that Keshub did. After the Cuch Behar marriage, however, she became very antagonistic to him and gave all her sympathy to the Sadharan

Samaj. Her best work in connection with the Brahma Samaj is her life of Ram Mohan, which will remain a standard book for a long time to come. It is undoubted that on the whole the visit of Keshub to England was of great benefit to the Brahma Samaj and to the country at large. It made the most thoughtful among the English see what the Hindu Race was capable of by way of producing spiritual character of a very high type, and thus it certainly raised the whole of the East higher in the estimation of Europeans.

With the end of this visit, a chapter in the life of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj may well be considered closed.

## Chapter VII

THE BHARATVARSHIYA BRAHMA SAMAJ  
(CONTINUED)

Keshub returned home after nearly nine months of absence to the great joy of his family and friends. While in England he was very much struck by the way in which Christianity had expressed itself in the beautiful home-life of the better sort of English people as well as in the various charities and philanthropies, some of them on a very vast scale, of that country. Moreover, his outlook was decidedly broadened in every way. Hence the first thing that he did, immediately after his arrival, was to start the Indian Reform Association. Hitherto the Brahma Samaj had confined itself largely to religious work, and its social reform also was a part of its religion. It was only in times of famine, flood and such other troubles that the Samaj did some philanthropic work. Keshub now wanted to systematize this spirit of social service, and make it a regular feature of the national life as he found it in England. It was with this purpose that this Association was started. Its membership was kept open for all, but its chief workers were the Brahma missionaries and laymen.

The work of this Association was divided in five sections, Charity, Woman's Education, Mass Education, Temperance and Cheap Literature. Under each of these heads work of new kind was undertaken, and the institution did not only a great deal of good, but being the first of its kind set an example which has

been increasingly followed since. It did very useful work under the sections of Charity and Temperance, it started schools for women and working classes, and a weekly pice-paper was started which was probably one of the first cheap papers. The school for women was called *The Normal School for Native Ladies*, and it was attended by a number of Zenana women. Some of the gatherings held by it were attended by the highest in the land including the Viceroy and the ladies of his court. For the working classes a night school was opened, and they were taught such things as would give them a sort of general culture. Alongside with it an Industrial School was opened, and there educated men and Brahma missionaries including Keshub learnt such occupations as carpentry. It must have been indeed a novel experience for all of them to learn these handicrafts, an experience not without real moral value. Besides, both these last-named Schools could not but create a healthy fellow-feeling between the educated and the illiterate people who were thus thrown together. Some of the lessons learnt in this Industrial School were not learnt in vain, for Keshub himself, when advised to refrain from mental work during his last illness, turned out beautiful pieces of furniture.

Another institution, of far greater importance, was the *Bharat Ashram*. It was established in 1871. It was a Home where several families lived together, and they had their meals and prayers in common. Most of these families belonged to the missionaries, but there were a few others also. It lasted for nearly five years, and during most of the time Keshub's activity centred

round it. Its prayers, common meals and work, studies, especially of women living in it for whom various classes were started, all these made it an ideal Ashram in several respects. Its inmates, both men and women, especially the latter, were immensely benefited spiritually and mentally. It was meant to embody the ideal of a Household of God which Keshub had set before himself ever since the formation of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. It was an inner body within the Samaj, into which Keshub wanted to inculcate the principles of Hero-worship, Special Providence etc., which had become characteristic of his teaching since his separation from the Maharshi. The institution was located in splendid houses, and the Normal School for women and *Bama Hitaishini Sabha* (Society for Women's Improvement) were working there. Pratap speaks of its influence in these words\* :

The common meals, common studies, common devotions, common work, the whole system of Bharat Ashram life was intended to make the brethren and sisters entirely one in mind and spirit. It was very like one of those experiments made in modern America for a primitive religious culture. The Brahma missionaries threw their whole heart into the matter, and became more united in heart than they had ever been. The Church became more perfect. During the five years that the Bharat Ashram lasted, it was a useful, delightful institution. Its influences have changed and elevated the careers of many Brahma families. Its memories, its friendships are undying in their sweetness and sacredness to many souls. The lessons of devotional and apostolical life learnt there have influenced the whole subsequent life of some of the inmates.

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\* The Life of Keshub.

This Home which was meant to realize the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in however small a measure, was not unfortunately without an undercurrent of discord. For three or four years it went on very well, but later on differences, in matters temporal and spiritual, between members broke out sometimes in a serious form, and they marred not only the beauty of its life but undermined its existence. One such quarrel arose over a petty question of payment and the long-smouldering fire was fanned to a flame. A big scandal was made out of this by the general public which had been all along intensely antagonistic to Keshub, and the vernacular press raised such a hubbub over it that Keshub, in order to save the reputation of the Ashram, had to sue a paper for libel. The case went up as far as the High Court and while it was in its final stage Keshub asked for an apology which was tendered and the case was withdrawn. The name of the Ashram was saved, but all this gave a serious blow to its existence.

In addition to these two big institutions, the Indian Reform Association and the Bharat Ashram, Keshub renewed several of the old ones which had altogether died or had been languishing. These were the Sangat Sabha, the Brahma School, the Society of Theistic Friends etc. The *Indian Mirror* was made a daily paper from a weekly, and it became the first English daily run by the people of the land. The Brahma Missionary Conference was established for the purpose of organising the missionary body. The Calcutta School developed into the Albert College. Meantime the mission-work was going on as usual. Thus the Brahma Samaj was

progressing all round, and its position as a socio-religious community was getting firmer. What contributed most towards making it such a community was the Marriage Bill that was passed in the year 1872.

It has been already said that a Bill called the Native Marriage Bill was introduced into the Viceroy's Council in 1868. Sir Henry Maine, the Law member of the Government of India, said on the occasion that it would be "in substance a Civil Marriage Bill, \*" as he had found it difficult to define the word Brahma.

The orthodox society took serious alarm at this' and opposed the Bill on the ground that it would cause disruption of the Hindu society. So determined was the opposition that the various Provincial Governments almost unanimously advised the dropping of the Bill as it stood. They said, however, that "the Bill would be unobjectionable if confined to the Brahma Samaj, for whose benefit it was originally designed." Sir James Stephen, the successor of Sir Henry Maine, engaged himself with such a Bill. At this stage, the Adi Brahma Samaj raised its voice against it. Their objection was that although they were Brahmas they looked upon themselves as Hindus, and moreover they did not want to be classified with the revolutionary Brahmas who put themselves voluntarily out of the pale

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\*That Bill was very similar to the Basu Bill, which was probably framed thereupon and was meant to give relief to those who objected to be married according to "the rites of any one of the recognized native religions" or within the limits prescribed by the Varnashram Dharma.

of the Varnashram Dharma.\* It is true they performed a few marriages according to a ceremony which was not strictly orthodox, but that never raised the slightest doubt in their minds, nor in those of others as to the validity of such marriages. They were thoroughly honest in this, but unfortunately much bad blood was created owing to the controversy that arose over this question. The whole matter centred round the definition of the terms 'Hindu' and 'Brahma' and the validity of the rites of the Adi Brahma Samaj. The more these things were discussed, the more confused they became. However, Keshub came to see the point of view of the Adi Brahma Samaj, and the proposed measure was abandoned. It was then that the present Native Marriage Act came to be passed on the 19th March 1872. It required from the parties marrying a declaration that they did not belong to any of the recognized religions of the land. The disowning of the 'Hindu' name which this Act involved was a fearful price to pay, for practically all Brahmas came from the Hindu community. But it was only on that condition that this legislation could be secured, and this last was essential to the existence and progress of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. The first two measures that were proposed were more moderate, but they could not be passed owing to the serious opposition of the

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\*The Socio-religious institution of the Hindus known as the Caste-system. *Varna* means colour and *Ashram* means stages of life. This system was based originally on the differences of colour (very like the societies of America and South Africa to-day), and on the division of the individual life in four stages viz. as student, householder, one given to solitary meditation, and the man dedicated to the Supreme.



generality of the Hindus and the Brahmas of the Adi Samaj respectively. That the passing of the measure with its negative clause should have caused much enthusiasm and joy in the new Brahma Samaj is surprising and shows that the progressive Brahmas including even Keshub at this stage were hot-headed reformers who lacked the sense of grave realities. It is perhaps true that without this Act the new Hindustan with its religious and social liberty would not have been possible so soon, but it sealed the fate of the Brahma Samaj.

This act made possible a number of reforms such as intermarriage, abolition of polygamy, of early marriage and of idolatrous rites in marriage. While trying to secure legislation on this matter, Keshub had tried to ascertain the proper marriageable age of both boys and girls from the best medical authorities in the country. It was in accordance with this opinion that the minimum age of marriage for girls was fixed at 14 and for boys at 18. This was only 'a starting-point for reform in this direction' as Keshub said in a lecture on the subject. And he added that "for the present at least, it would be expedient to follow the provision in the Bill which makes fourteen the minimum marriageable age for girls in this country, leaving it in the hands of time to develop this reform slowly and gradually into maturity and fullness." In view of the extremely early marriages then performed, especially in Bengal, even this age was a step in advance on the part of the Brahmas, and the discussion of such a vital question was bound to be helpful to the general public.

In view of the importance of this legislation and its consequences to the Brahma Samaj, it may be of interest to look at the question more fully. The discussions, controversies and agitation that arose over it forced the Brahmas of both the Samajes to look, perhaps for the first time fully, into the bases and position of their religion and the whole movement. Since the time of Devendranath, the Samaj had advanced step by step, leaving its old moorings and at the same time without knowing fully where it went. At each step on their onward march, both Devendra and Keshub were guided by impulses which they considered divine. While doing this they never looked to the consequences which, however, were not slow in coming. The first serious result of their trust in their own intuitions was the conflict between the leaders themselves which ended in their separation. But the causes of the conflict do not seem to have been quite clear to either side at that time. The matter became clear only now. In obedience to what they considered to be the command of Conscience, the progressive Brahmas broke with Caste, and thus tried to establish the principle of the Brotherhood of Man which was a cardinal one in their eyes. It was at this stage that the question whether they should be regarded as Hindus was asked. They had a vague idea at first that their religion was something larger than Hinduism, but they never faced this question fully until circumstances forced them to do so. The Hindus in those days would not allow them to have the liberty of intermarriage, a reform upon which their minds were set. What they

should have done was to suffer for this reform, rather than seek redress at the hands of a foreign Government by means of legislation. This was the only proper course for them to take as true *Satyagrahis* which they certainly were, perhaps the noblest that the land has known in modern times. Unfortunately they tried to stand on their rights and sought the help of the Government. This only brought out and organized the opposition of the people which was latent or at most only sporadic. Thus the inevitable result of the agitation and the legislation as it was passed was that it permanently alienated the *Brahma Samaj of India*—and this was the only Samaj that counted in the eyes of the people—from the Hindu public. This false move on its part, which also was not an isolated event in its existence but rather the climax of the tendency working in it ever since the days of Devendranath's first connection with the Brahma Sabha, was fatal to its very existence. Henceforth the Brahma Samaj could be only an exotic plant not rooted in the heart of Hindustan.

It must be said, however, that in this matter the Adi Brahma Samaj was led by a sound instinct. The members of it claimed themselves to be Hindus, even the truest of them, and rightly so. Their giving up of the infallibility of the Vedas did not prejudice their claim in any way in their minds. It was otherwise with Keshub and his party. They fell a prey to the disintegrating tendencies of those days created by English education and Christian missions, tendencies become more pronounced, as was inevitable, owing to the presence of a foreign Government. This is evident

from their idea of the Brahma Samaj as a non-Hindu body. In a memorial that was sent to the Government in reply to one from the Adi Samaj, Keshub wrote: "the term *Hindu* does not include the Brahmas, who deny the authority of the Vedas, are opposed to every form of Brahmanical religion, and being eclectics admit proselytes from Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians and other religious sects." This is as arbitrary a definition of the term *Hindu* as any other. As a matter of fact, the term 'Hindu' has never been used in an exclusively religious sense in the same way as the term 'Christian' or 'Moslem,' and the attempt to define it in that way made for the first time by the British Government, Christian Missionaries and Western Scholars followed by the people of the land has been short-lived and futile. Under the influence of such a definition and the separatist tendency behind it, the Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and Brahmas thought for a time that they were non-Hindus, but happily the term is coming to its own in the fulness of time. The truest definition of the term was given by the late Mr. Vaidya, the founder of the Hindu Missionary Society, and it is—*Whoever calls himself a Hindu is a Hindu*. It has a national and a cultural connotation more than anything else. It really means—Whoever is willing to cast in his lot with the majority of the people of the land called Hindustan, sharing with them their cultural and national heritage, is a Hindu. As such the term is applicable even to men professing such faiths as Islam and Christianity, provided they will call themselves so. The present writer has known some Mohammedans willing to call themselves Hindus in

this sense, and he has known an increasing number of Christians willing to regard themselves as such. He has known even some Europeans and Americans who consider themselves to be Hindus in this sense. The only racial and cultural and therefore national solidarity in Hindustan centres round this term, and whoever is not a part of this union, almost organic, works against it. All this Keshub took time to learn, and his later stage, especially the one under the New Dispensation period, has been one of the most potent agencies in creating that new mentality which has been working towards an ever-increasing integration of the Hindu Nation. Thus Keshub is his own critic, and the truest of them. This will be clear from the following two quotations which represent two stages of Keshub's own life and to a certain extent of the Brahma Samaj. As late as 1876, four years after this Bill was passed there appeared in the *Indian Mirror*, Keshub's paper, the following note :

We rather look upon this particular clause\* in the Act as its vital and crowning point, and regard the circumstances which led to its adoption as altogether providential. We verily believe that the Brahma Samaj has thereby been saved, just in time, from falling into that vast and all-absorbing vortex of Hindnism, which by its treacherous tolerance has swallowed up almost all the reform movements in the country, and eventually crushed and absorbed every system of religious reform that came trustingly too near its hidden rocks..... Such absorption is inevitable, unless our people guard their Church carefully against the danger. The clause in question in the Marriage Act will serve as an effective safeguard.

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\* The clause mentioned is the negative one declaring that the persons married according to the Act are not Hindus etc.

It is a strong and mighty chain whereby the Brahma Samaj carried far away from the Hindu religion, has safely tied itself to a non-Hindu position, from which the most impetuous currents of reactionary conservatism will not be able to drive it. The progressive Brahma cannot relapse to-morrow, for he legally declares himself to-day as a non Hindu.

In striking contrast to this stands the following which appears in the Preface to the Nava Samhita written in the last days of Keshub as a sort of his last Will and Testament to his followers and country :

It (the New Samhita) is only the national Law of the Aryans of the new Church in India, in which is embodied the spirit of the New Faith in its application to social life. It contains the essence of God's moral law adapted to the peculiar needs and structure of reformed Hindus and based upon their national instincts and traditions.

Thus Keshub is his own critic, the truest and for that very reason the severest of them. But unfortunately at the time we are speaking of, he was swayed along with his religious ideals by that of secular nationalism. The same leaven is still working in parts of the Brahma Samaj, and even Keshub's own followers are not quite free from it.

To resume the thread of the story, while the Brahma Samaj on the one hand was expanding, on the other serious differences on questions of religious life and doctrine and also of social reform were manifesting themselves among the members of the body itself. The creed of the Samaj was as latitudinarian as it could be. All shades of religious belief from the veriest Deism bordering on Agnosticism to the most reverent hero-worshipping Theism stopping short only of a full belief

in Incarnation, were represented in it. One set of people made a virtue of believing too much while the other of too little. Some joined the Samaj for the sake of that social liberty which they found in it. These various elements were bound to come to a clash some day. It has been already said that ever since the happenings at Mongyr, there were two parties in the Samaj. After his return from England and especially after the establishment of the Bharat Ashram, Keshub had tried to inculcate in an increasing measure those principles which, according to him, were vital to true Religion. Strong objection was taken to this by a large number of members and their opposition grew in volume as time went. The differences between these two parties centred round the belief in 'Great Men' and in 'Inspiration.'

Besides, a potent cause of differences in the Brahma Samaj was the question of constitution. Those who did not subscribe to Keshub's religious principles and whose outlook was certainly rationalistic, were not satisfied that the management of the Samaj should rest so largely in the hands of Keshub and his disciples. To them this looked like too much of a sacerdotal and ecclesiastical business. They evidently thought that the Samaj in the hands of such men with their peculiar beliefs concerning asceticism, faith, inspiration, and with their long devotions, would cause the revival of many of the exploded superstitions and would take the country back to medievalism. Some of them suspected Keshub to be preparing a place for himself among these Great Men whose hero-worship he was inculcating. Many of them honestly desired a more democratic form of government.

in the Samaj, and they thought Keshub to be too autocratic. In addition to these, Keshub's ascendancy, genius and fame were too great not to excite personal jealousy in the minds of not a few of them. Thus all these people who were guided by a variety of motives wanted a share in the management of the affairs of the Samaj, and they began with criticizing almost everything that Keshub did. They cried out for a radical change.

The first manifestation in a serious form of these differences was over the question of emancipation of women. Many of these radicals were not satisfied with the slow pace of Keshub in this matter. They did not want their women-folk to be confined to the screened gallery in the mandir reserved for them. They wanted them to sit among men, a practice which violated all the rules of propriety known to the people of Bengal, who rarely allow their women to appear in public even now after more than a century of connection with the British Government. But as the Brahmas had been innovators in other things, there was no reason why they should not be in this also. Besides, was not such equality of women with men only a corollary of the great principle of equality of all men, which the Brahma Samaj had put into practice in its abolition of caste-distinctions? Hence, two of these "female-emancipationists," as they were called, boldly took their women with them in the midst of general congregation to the consternation of Keshub and others. So serious was the agitation raised over this matter that these 'emancipationists' started a separate service of their own. After some time on Keshub's allowing the ladies of the radical party to sit without a



screen if they so liked, there was a reconciliation between the two parties, but it was only a patched-up peace, for there was a radical difference between these men and Keshub. Though foremost in breaking Caste, which he believed to be against the cardinal principle of the Brotherhood of man, Keshub in the eyes of these men was but a moderate reformer. It was not so much a difference of ideas or of details but of the whole outlook, that separated him from them. He looked at all questions in their moral and religious significance, and the supreme aim of his life and work was to establish an ideal Church and Community, where purity, truth and love might reign supreme. Although he welcomed with all the ardour of his soul what was best in the West and especially what was pervaded therein by the Spirit of Christ, nothing was further from his mind than to imitate Western customs and manners in social or domestic life. In all these things he was very conservative and wanted to preserve all that was best in the Hindu life and civilization. In customs like the *purdah*, he wanted to move in such a way as not to make liberty degenerate into licence. This was not the case with the majority of those who opposed him at this time. Their outlook was largely secular, and they were guided by a desire to reproduce in the land some of the forms and conditions of life prevailing in the West. Most of them were highly cultured and held high positions in life, some of them had returned from England after a long stay there bringing with them an uncritical admiration for everything that they saw there, and a few of them were gifted men, leaders of thought and action in the field of politics,

education, science, law and scholarship. But there was hardly one among them all who was noted then or came to be known later on, for great spirituality of character or originality of thought on religious subjects. They were almost all of them secularists. It was not without reason, therefore, that Miss Collett who was in close touch with the Samaj for several years came to call these two parties, the one led by Keshub and the other opposing him, by the names 'Sacerdotalists' and 'Secularists.' There were, thus, two tendencies in the Brahma Samaj, the one other-worldly and the other this-worldly, and they were bound to come to a clash some day.

The acute phase of the struggle began with the secession of the 'emancipationists,' mentioned above. About two years later in 1874, a number of those men who wanted constitutional government in the Samaj and were keen about rational interpretation of the Brahma Dharma, the religion of the Samaj, organized themselves into a definite body. This they called the Samdarshi Party (Impartial Party), and they started a monthly magazine of their own called '*Samdarshi*' wherein they criticized Keshub, his methods and work. They also started an agitation for constitution in the management of the affairs of the Calcutta congregation as well as the Brahma Samaj in general. Meetings were called at their requisition by Keshub who was the secretary of the Samaj, but so radical were the differences and such was the mutual distrust that although committees were formed very little was done. While the struggle was thus becoming keener, Keshub was possessed by one

of those spiritual impulses that came to him often, and under the influence of which alone he was able to carry the Samaj forward.

It was in the beginning of the year 1875 that a change came over Keshub. The various activities he had initiated since his return from England had weakened the missionary zeal, and Keshub was the first to detect this gradual cooling down of enthusiasm. Besides, he may well have thought that the only way to heal the differences in the body was to engage the mind of the members thereof with something higher. It was this that had saved the Progressive Party after they left the Maharshi, and the same might be the case again. Whatever it be, the impulse was on him, and according to his usual manner he submitted to it fully.

The change manifested itself first in the form of *Vairagya* (Asceticism). Keshub said that worldliness had crept into the Brahma Samaj, and it must be remedied by *Vairagya*. His prayers, thoughts, writings, all became pervaded by the spirit of other-worldliness, and in order to promote it he began cooking his own meals and adopted primitive simplicity in eating and drinking. The missionaries followed him in this. In the words of Moozumdar,\* "Strict poverty was enjoined on the missionaries, long hours were spent in devotions, every one had to cook his simple meal at least once a day, mid-night vigils were begun to be kept....." Keshub also bought a small garden not far from the city where they might retire now and

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\*The Life of Keshub.

then, and give themselves wholly to spiritual culture. Here they lived the life of ascetics, devotees and Yogis. The place was called "*Sadhan Kanan* ( Garden of Religious Culture ), and was turned into a regular hermitage. Here Keshub and his immediate followers passed their time in study and thought, meditation and prayer, worship and manual work of all kinds. Keshub gave a series of short discourses on spiritual subjects such as Bhakti, Jnana, Yoga and Seva (Service) to four of his disciples according to the special aptitude of each of them. These talks have been published under the name of *Brahma-Gitopanishad*. In 1877 he set to four of his disciples the task of studying the four great Religions of the world—Hinduism, Christianity, Mohammedanism and Buddhism—one to each of them, charging them with the duty of finding out the supreme truth therefrom.

These new experiences and developments were not without their due effect on the deeply religious soul of Keshub, or rather they were the outcome of his expanding mind and genius. The deeper he entered the religious life, the more he felt the truth of the teachings of various great Religions, while the majority of the Brahmas of the old or the new school would have very little to do with these Religions in general, and still less with their special tenets, and they looked upon them as a mere mass of superstition and priestcraft. Keshub yearned to know the inner meaning of each and the organic union of all of them. He realized that these had at their base a solid substratum of Truth, and it was due to that alone that they had lived for ages

and helped Humanity in a way which it was evident the Brahma Samaj could never hope to do. He had already formulated the principle of Hero-worship and added it to the colourless creed of the Brahma Dharma. But as a general principle only it was apt to be colourless, and so it was necessary to go behind it and find out the various types of greatness and the particular ideas and teachings for which these 'Great Men' stood. This kind of work was done by Carlyle and Emerson, both of whom had some influence on Keshub in his younger days, but his interest in Great Men was not intellectual, but chiefly moral and religious. He wanted to realize for himself and for his Church all those great experiences which were of the essence of the lives of the great Teachers. It was in this way that he wanted to make the Brahma Dharma as deep and broad as it could be. Keeping the simple basis of Theism intact, he wanted to raise on it as big a superstructure as possible, and to this end he devoted all his efforts during these years and those following the second schism.

This great work was done in a variety of ways. For the first time in the history of the Samaj, the comparative method in the study of Religions was applied on a large scale. Ram Mohan was a pioneer in this kind of work, but in his case the sphere of study was limited because he could not interest himself in those phenomena of religious life which would not commend themselves at once to his iconoclastic rationalism. With Keshub it was different from now onwards. He tried to fathom the meaning and significance of such things as Polytheism, Pantheism, Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement etc., not

from the point of view of narrow reason, but from that larger one called Mysticism, and thus understand their true place in the entire economy of Providence. Devendranath and to a lesser extent Ram Mohan rejected as untrue what did not commend itself to them, or what they did not find response to within themselves. Not so Keshub. It is true he lacked a definite scale of values, but he did not think so highly of himself nor so poorly of human nature in general as to depend entirely upon a purely subjective standard. He was anxious to find truth and more truth, and was too humble to think that the seal of finality had been affixed to the little light that the Samaj had so far received. In his anniversary lecture of 1876, "Our Faith and Experiences" he said:

Now I tell you plainly we do not mean to stand where we are. Have we, then, not yet found the truth? We have, but we need more. Have we not seen the light? Yes, we have, but how it shines into the perfect day, we have yet to see..... Therefore we mean to go further and further, under the guidance of God, in the path of ever-increasing wisdom, love, purity and joy, never satisfied with what is achieved, but always panting and struggling after fresh acquisitions.

To this comparative method was added another which we may well call experimental. Keshub wanted to test at first the value of various teachings by personal experience and realization, and then to lay before the world the results of these researches of his. The nineteenth century was the age of Science, and consciously or unconsciously he had imbibed the spirit of Science, although there was very little agreement between him and the chief exponents thereof on questions of spiritual

import. He also employed what he called the method of analysis as well as that of synthesis. He tried to understand and realize the significance of each single idea and principle by itself in the world of Religion, and after doing this to understand all things in their totality. The influence of all this work upon his character at that time has been thus described by Pratap :

Thus within a short time Keshub's devotions consolidated into transcendental insight. He acquired a prophetic vision into the hidden things both of Hindu and Christian theology. He recast and reinterpreted the conceptions of the Vedic and Pauranic religion. He dissolved the gods and goddesses of his people in spiritual analysis, and refilled the Hindu pantheon with immortal ideals of wisdom and piety. The popular deities of the land were divested of their idolatrous embodiment, explained in their esoteric meaning, and became sublimated into the poetry and æsthetics of reformed Hinduism. He boldly dealt with the Christian doctrines of the Logos, the Incarnation and the Pre-existence of Christ. He attempted the rehabilitation of Christianity in the faith and reverence of his countrymen. He went into the discussion of the most obscure questions of the essence of nature and the human spirit. His fervid glowing conceptions found utterance in language, worship and symbolism which for a time were misunderstood. But underneath it all, there was the rapt communion of the human and the Divine : there was the restoration of the national standards of piety. Like his whole character, his devotions were most complex, every fibre of faith, feeling, culture, wisdom, insight being woven together, yet the complexity assimilated itself so well with his nature that the prayers and precepts that resulted therefrom were of the simplest and most natural description. The deepest philosophy became a child-like fervour of faith and feeling.

It was when Keshub had made considerable progress in this new path that he came to form in 1876 or thereabout that acquaintance with Ram Krishna Paramhansa, which soon ripened into lasting friendship to the great advantage of both of them, of the Brahma Samaj and of the whole of Hindustan. Altogether unknown to fame as Ram Krishna was at that time, Keshub soon saw what a wonderful jewel was hidden under the rough and even repellent exterior of the half-dressed, insane-looking and untutored man. It is only a genius that can recognise a genius, for among the many persons of high and noble character that Ram Krishna had already seen there was hardly one who understood the worth of that remarkable man. With Keshub it was different. In spite of a world of outward differences, both of them found in each other a kindred spirit, in short, nothing less than a man of God. As for Ram Krishna, he represented or rather incarnated in himself a great deal of medieval Hinduism. A Vedantin in belief that he was, he abounded in the Bhakti of the Bhagwat type. He had spiritualized the whole of the Hindu pantheon in a remarkable and original manner, and had arrived at a synthesis of almost the whole of Hinduism by the very simplicity of his genius and character. The meeting of such a man at a time when Keshub was passing through what was nothing less than a crisis could not but be of very great help to him. It was like adding fuel to the fire that had already taken possession of him with a fresh vigour. As was the case with his most teachable spirit always, he readily learnt whatever was good and new in



the thought and practice of Ram Krishna, and thereby decidedly deepened his character. Their relations were those of the best of friends who understood each other perfectly and exercised mutual influence. The members of the Brahma Samaj soon came to know the Paramhansa, and the public also came to know him through a series of articles written by Keshub under the caption "A Hindu Saint" in the *Indian Mirror*. The chief effect of this friendship on Keshub is to be found in the idea of the Motherhood of God which took an increasing hold upon him from this time forth, and more so after the second schism. The idea was not quite new to Keshub, but it certainly did receive much emphasis from contact with Ram Krishna.

All these developments were far from welcome to the Secularists. While Keshub was drawing nearer through these experiences to both Hinduism and Christianity and was at the same time trying to find out what was common to both, the majority of the Brahmas including those of the Adi Samaj thought that the purity of the Brahma Dharma was being compromised, and so they raised a cry of protest against all these 'innovations'. Already the ideas of Inspiration, Special Providence and Dispensation to which Keshub had given a more pronounced utterance in his anniversary addresses of 1873 and 1875, had disturbed the minds of the people a great deal. To them were now added *Vairagya* and *Yoga*, and a deeper and more reverent study of the various Religions. Due to all this the discontent continued to grow, and it needed but time and some

serious cause to break out into open revolt. These were not far from coming.

Meantime the Secularist Party pressed more and more for constitution and representative government in the affairs of the Samaj. In all probability they would have achieved this much sooner, an event which would have rendered the schism unnecessary, if they had been guided by any central aim and a leader of note. But they were themselves lacking in unity, in earnest enthusiasm over the cause of the Brahma Samaj, in qualities of leadership and in organization also. Their aims were divided, and the only thing which united them was the general sense of discontent with Keshub and his work. The only sign of some sort of religious earnestness found among them was in a group of five of them who, in the words of Pandit Shivrath Shastri "decided to meet regularly for private prayer and for the earnest discussion of the situation," a group of men that was encouraged by the Maharshi who gave it the name of *Panch Pradip* (Five Lamps). It was as late as 1876 that this Secularist Party, which included in it Panch Pradip, Samdarshi Party, the Emancipationists and others, brought forward a proposal for the formation of a Representative Assembly, similar to the one Keshub himself had pressed for when he was with the Maharshi. Soon after Keshub called one or two meetings, but it was in 1877 that a serious effort was made to organise such an Assembly. A provisional Committee of eight members, six of whom were from the new party, was appointed to draw up a scheme for the purpose, and some three or four months after a

*Pratinidhi Sabha* (Representative Assembly) came into being. Keshub was its President, and Ananda Mohan Bose and Shivrath Shastri, both of whom were the leading members of the other party, were the Secretary and Assistant Secretary respectively. It formed several sub-committees and started work under various heads such as collection of statistics relating to the Samaj, publication of Brahma literature, raising of funds and such other things. But before anything of importance could be done by this Assembly, the whole of the Brahma Samaj got involved in the great question of the Cuch Behar marriage.

The question of the relation between this Pratinidhi Sabha and the Brahma Samaj is worth considering owing to its serious character and importance. The Brahma Samaj was largely the work of Keshub and the missionaries. It was their creation and they had sustained it with their continuous efforts. They had given up their all to do this work. They received no regular pay for it. The missionaries were maintained from a fund to which all and sundry including non-Brahmas contributed, and even then it was hardly sufficient for their daily needs. These men were leading apostolic lives, and although most of them had families their poverty was even greater than that of Sadhus and Fakirs. The question was: Should these men be controlled by a body of laymen or by one with a large preponderance of them as was bound to be the case under a representative system? To this there was only one answer from them and that was in the negative. The question is a fundamental one, and it was on this

largely that the Brahma Samaj came to be divided. The ideas of Keshub and of the missionaries in regard to Church Government were apostolic, whereas those of their opponents were constitutional. Keshub said that the missionaries should be governed by a body composed of themselves only, and so he agreed to take up the question of the Representative Assembly on the express understanding that it was not meant to control the Brahma Samaj, but to be only an auxiliary to it. Possibly the truth of what he stood for was seen by some of the members of the constitutional party, and they agreed to his proposal.

In this Keshub was fighting not for his personal ascendancy over the missionaries and the Brahma Samaj but for a principle that may be considered fundamental in all religious organizations. On the other hand this general principle, which is sound and true, was over-emphasized in his case. Perhaps he went to the other extreme. In this as in some other things he was like the Quakers. The idea of apostolic independence or rather obedience to the Inner Light alone was a principal feature of his mind from his early years, and it grew with age. In his *Jeevan Veda* (Scriptures of Life), a set of auto-biographical sermons, he says :

Until I hear the voice of God I will never begin any undertaking. This kind of determination may be dangerous to other men, but I am fortunate, it never did me any harm. My independence, however, is not the self-will based upon pride which is to be bought in the market of worldliness. I did not seek independence to exalt myself, or to attain a high place among men. I loved independence, but was not enslaved

by it. If I subjected myself to men, hundreds would have joined my party to-day. If I subjected men to me by any false fascination my party to-day would have been crowded. But I have made independence the captain of my band. Therefore I call those who are with me my friends, I never call myself their *Guru* or master. Liberty shall triumph! When Independence calls men, if any want to come, let them come. I shall never set myself as a guide to others. Let there be no *Guruism*. I abhor subjection. And what I hate in myself, do I not hate that in others? I can not bear to see any one, even the least in my church, depend upon another.....If I fail to create any community, if I fail to draw any man to my side, better that than that I should enslave a man's soul.... ..If there are fifty men in my party, they are of fifty different minds. Truth is my witness, the Sun and Moon are my witnesses, if there be a hundred men present here, each of them is his own chief..... In the New Dispensation there is perfect liberty for every man. Who is the preceptor, what is the Brahma Samaj, where is my party among Brahmas? I am attached to nothing, to nobody. Therefore there is no agreement between me and anybody. May God bless me and my brethren that there may be perfect independence amongst us. By that only will our numbers increase\*.

This was literally true of Keshub's relations with others including those who came to be known as his disciples. It was in accordance with this ideal that he had set before himself that he could not do violence to those who went too far in their reverence for him. It was also because of this that he has been spoken of repeatedly by Pratap, his chief disciple, friend and biographer, as a very weak governor or as one who would not govern at all. It seems from other accounts that he

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\*Translation given in the Life of Keshub by P. C. Moozomdar.

was constitutionally incapable of governing others, and he has been said to have never given a direct command to any one in his life. Thus Keshub wanted to rule his life as well as that of his Church according to the commands of Conscience, extremely difficult as this task is. To him the Conscience was veritably the voice of God from his early years and he came to call it Inspiration or *Adesh* from 1873 onwards. It was his loyalty to the inner voice which had much to do with the division of the Brahma Samaj both times, and it was again on the same principle that his own Church went almost to pieces, particularly after his death. Keshub himself realized the dangers of such independence in his last days, but it was too late for him to mend matters. We shall again hear what Pratap has to say on the subject :

He became more and more authoritative towards his later years, and he openly said that the authority belonged not to the lower, but the higher self in him. The man who never expressed a direct wish in regard to his most intimate friend, now became a legislator, and the law he gave he meant to make perfectly binding.....He readily conceded to the other Brahma missionaries the privilege of receiving inspiration when they sought it, but he held that they did not on all occasions seek it, or walk by the light of heaven. Not being spiritually minded enough for this, they should, he thought, be guided by rules and injunctions, sanctioned by him, under Divine guidance, in the name of the community. This was the principle of Church government he meant to work out since the announcement of the New Dispensation. But this new principle of Church government did not promise to work well. In the first place the apostles, whose unanimous consent

alone was authoritative, could seldom agree on any important subject, their personal attitudes towards each other being very undesirable. Whatever therefore was done towards controlling the body was attempted to be done by himself and his authority. In the next place Keshub was conscious that any rule he wanted to apply to refractory members, some of them secretly applied to him, and if he claimed to be free from the rules of criticism because he walked by the light of the Spirit, they raised exactly the same plea. So his own authority, high as it was, was not equally final with every one of his followers.....Also the essential privilege of individual inspiration, which he had claimed on behalf of every member of his Church, was fatal to the interests of any personal control. Whenever any rule or discipline was found unpleasant, or irksome, the plea of inspiration was raised to set it aside. Evidently it was either too early or too late to introduce this principle of authority into the details of life, and Keshub at times became exceedingly despondent and indignant.\*

The final verdict of Pratap on this matter some time after Keshub's death is thus given :

The government of the Church is a problem which Keshub never solved, and it is farther from solution than before.†

This was due not to any special defect in Keshub's own character, but to the lack of a central principle of authority in the Brahma Samaj or Brahma Dharma. In the absence of this the Government of the Church became either autocratic as with the Maharshi and with Keshub during the last years of his life, or anarchic as in the later history of the New Dispensation Church, or too constitutional to have a soul in it as in

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\* The Life of Keshub

†The Life of Keshub.

the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. As early as 1867, Lal Behari Dey had defined Brahmaism as 'the conjugation of the verb to think', and whether in the realm of thought or intuition or inspiration, it always remained too subjective to have much spiritual or even social cohesion.

The year 1878 opened a most gloomy prospect before the Brahma Samaj. The cause of this was the well-known episode of the Cuch Behar Marriage. The Maharaja of Cuch Behar was a minor, who had received a fairly good training under the guidance of the British administrator of his state, his father having died while he was quite young. In order that the good effects of his education might continue, it was thought advisable to have a suitable Maharani for him. As the Cuch Behar Raj family was not very particular about caste restrictions in this matter, it being in all probability of un-Aryan origin, the administrator looked for a bride from among the Brahmas. After seeing some girls they selected Keshub's eldest daughter as the fittest person, and the proposal came from the Bengal Government itself. To Keshub all this was entirely unexpected as he had taken no initiative in the matter. Even when the negotiations seemed to break off at one moment, he did not take any steps to resume them. But when the definite proposal came, he considered it providential and accepted it. Keshub seems to have regarded this marriage as a sort of public duty on his part. He had always a very high sense of his mission and position as the minister and leader of the Brahma Samaj, and to



him the Samaj was the National Church raised up by God Almighty for the salvation of his country. His influence had already reached the various parts of British India, and here was the prospect of a Native State coming in direct and close touch with the Brahma Samaj. Moreover this was altogether unsought by him. Could it be anything but of God? So he seems to have argued within himself. To more than one friend in England he wrote of it as a politico-religious marriage, and it was rather as a public than as a private man that he welcomed it. This becomes evident also from what Pratap says: "He repeatedly said that if any other person did what he was doing, he would undoubtedly protest with vigour".\*

But all did not look upon the proposed marriage in the same way. While Keshub's own family and friends viewed it with joy, the party that was antagonistic to him in almost every thing, looked upon it from the start with much suspicion and dislike. As soon as the announcement of the marriage was made, they raised a hue and cry over it. Pundit Shivnath Shastri says: "This was a signal for many from amongst the general body of Brahmas, as well as 'emancipationists,' the constitutionalists, the Five Lamps men and the Secret League men, to combine into a strong and compact body of protestors against the intended marriage.†" They appointed a provisional committee of most of their leading men, and sent to Keshub a letter wherein they

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\* The Life of Keshub.

† History of the Brahma Samaj.

recorded their objections to the proposed marriage. The grounds of their protest were : I that it was to be an early marriage, the prince being hardly sixteen and the bride less than fourteen: II that the marriage would not be theistic or Brahmic and very likely idolatrous ceremonies would be performed in connection with it : III that the Maharaja being only a minor could not be relied on not to fall a prey to the custom of polygamy prevalent in the families of native princes. Keshub had already provided for these things and in his very first negotiations with the Bengal Government had stipulated I that the ceremony of marriage had to be gone through so early only because it was thought advisable to get the prince married before he went to Europe: II that the marriage was to be looked upon as a formal betrothal, its consummation taking place later on when both of them were of proper age: III that the marriage rites were not to contain anything of the nature of idolatry: and IV that the Maharaja should declare in writing that he was a Brahma or a Theist.

Thus there was not much room for protest at this stage at any rate. However, some of the protestors might have honestly felt that a marriage of this kind would surely compromise the position of the Brahma Samaj in view of Keshub's place in it, and hence their remonstrations were not without meaning. But unfortunately many personal causes came to play a prominent part in the agitation over the matter, and the trouble assumed formidable proportions. All sorts of motives were attributed to Keshub and wicked stories were set afloat

by some of his opponents. The public criticisms and protest centred round the fact that the marriage was not to be performed according to the Act of 1872, which had been passed chiefly by the efforts of Keshub himself, and it was therefore open to all the evils against which it was meant to serve as a safeguard. It is true Keshub was guilty in this of breaking the letter of the law, but for that very reason he was truer to the spirit of the reform behind the law. We have already said that Keshub should not have gone in for legislation in this matter, but allowed the reform to grow entirely from within without seeking the aid of the Government in any form. Thus the real mistake that was made was there, and not here. Besides, this marriage, so far, was going to fulfil all those conditions which Keshub had sought to provide for when he first sought the help of legislation. It must be remembered here that the Act of 72 was what he had to accept as a matter of necessity. He wanted to provide chiefly for unidolatrous inter-caste marriages. This marriage was going to be unidolatrous, and it was radically inter-caste even to the point of being inter-racial. This last point which was a most important one was altogether overlooked in the heat of the moment, and has not been since sufficiently emphasized. Besides, one of the chief reasons why the marriage could not take place according to the Act was due to the fact that the Act was not applicable to the Cuch Behar State. Another point of criticism was that both the bridegroom and the bride were not of the age which Keshub had got recognized as the minimum marriageable

age. In this also Keshub was guilty of breaking the letter but not the spirit of the law. This was only a nominal marriage which it was thought advisable the prince should undergo "for political reasons" before proceeding to England to finish his education. The consummation was not to take place just then but only after the prince had returned from England by which time both of them would be of proper age.

Perhaps the only serious objection that could have been brought against the proposed marriage was that it was open to polygamy since the prince could not be bound by the provisions of the Act of 72. Keshub trusted Providence in this, and he may have well thought that the public opinion behind the marriage would be too strong for the future Maharaja to go against it. In this at least he was not mistaken. Not only was there no bigamy on the part of the Maharaja, but ever since the Raj family of Cuch Behar has been identified with the Brahma Samaj, it has already served as a refuge to a princess of no less a family than that of the Gaekwar himself from the evils of polygamy to which she would have been sacrificed. Besides, it is one of the very few royal families in the land to-day which serve as a connecting-link between royalty on one hand and democracy on the other so far as social life including marriage is concerned. All this is made possible by its position in the Brahma Samaj. It is true we may not find looking back to the marriage over the period of half a century that has since elapsed all those things that Keshub's sanguine heart may have

expected from this match, and we may find some things which may even disappoint us. But it is undoubted that Keshub fully trusted Providence in this, and he accepted the marriage as the opening of a new door for his religion to step in. It was a case of stooping a little to conquer, and the marriage resembled some of those performed in olden days between Christian maidens with non-Christian princes of European countries in the hope that such marriages would advance the cause of Christianity, which they did not fail to do to a certain extent.

Hitherto we have discussed the situation as it was before the marriage took place. Now we shall take up the question of the ceremony itself. The marriage, in order to be valid in Cuch Behar, had to be a Hindu marriage. From a statement made later on by the Brahma Samaj on behalf of Keshub, we learn that the Government in its letter to Keshub had pointed out "that the proposed marriage was calculated to do a great deal of good to the country, and suggested therefore, that both parties should, so far as possible, facilitate arrangements for its consummation." Therefore, he "was requested to say on what points he required a deviation from the ordinary usages of orthodox Hindu marriage." The reply to this was "that the marriage should be celebrated according to the ritual of the Brahma Samaj i. e. Hindu rites divested of idolatry, though such local customs might be supplemented as were unidolatrous:" and that "all the theistic conditions as to marriage rites

must be strictly observed : but on other points local usages of a simply unreasonable or absurd nature were insisted upon, these might be tolerated." In order to settle what was essential for such a ceremonial as might satisfy both parties, a conference was held between the Raj Pundit of Cuch Behar and Gour Govind Roy, a missionary of the Brahma Samaj who, ever since the foundation of the Bhartavarshiya Brahma Samaj, was especially useful in all such work owing to his superior knowledge of the Brahmanical Shastras. They agreed upon a form of ceremony to be observed, and preparations were made for the marriage on both sides. The formal act of betrothal was gone through and the bride and the bridegroom were introduced to each other. The prince declared in writing that he was a Theist, and he was presented to some of the most notable men of Calcutta, specially invited for the purpose, as the future son-in-law of Keshub. Pratap says :—"The bridegroom and bride had more than one interview, naturally feelings of affection sprang up : morally and materially the marriage was a certainty."\*

While things had proceeded smoothly so far, there came a sudden hitch only two days before the bridal party was to leave Calcutta for Cuch Behar. A telegram came from Cuch Behar saying that the ceremony agreed upon could not be observed, particularly the Brahmic portions thereof. Keshub sent his protest, but misgivings were felt for the first time and he wanted the special train to be stopped before

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\* The Life of Keshub.

this matter was satisfactorily solved. But as this could not be done he left for Cuch Behar. In this he acted weakly, but he seems to have been buoyed up with the hope that the Government which had repeatedly assured him that there would be nothing in the ceremony to violate his religious principles, would not allow any serious departure to be made from the rites agreed upon. But this hope was in vain. The Government proved a broken reed to lean upon. The administrator and others did not understand fully the matter in dispute, they were in a perplexed condition and did not know what to do. As for the parties, there was a regular tug of war between them. The Raj party naturally thought that once Keshub was in Cuch Behar, they would have their way with him. They at first proposed that the marriage would have to be fully Hindu in order to be valid, and that even the presence of Keshub and other Brahmas would have to be dispensed with at the time of marriage owing to their being non-Hindus. In this way the dispute went on almost to the end and it seemed as if the match might have to be broken off. However, it was just before the actual marriage hour that a compromise was made that the bride on her part should not perform any ceremony involving idolatry. Upon this, Keshub and his party proceeded to the place of marriage, and they saw there certain objects which, though veiled, were not welcome to their sight. The bride was given away by Keshub's brother, but Keshub and his Brahma friends were there on the spot and they held their divine service. But this "was drowned by the deafening peal of

innumerable tomtoms." Pratap adds that "Keshub and non-Brahmin priests on his side were, however, allowed to preside over the ceremonies. The marriage vows were not allowed to be taken at the scene of marriage, but were taken afterwards. *Hom* or the ceremony of fire—worship was not performed by Keshub's daughter, but by the Maharaja\* !"

The marriage that was thus performed satisfied no party, and least of all Keshub. As Pratap says "He tried to make the best of a bad case." Max Muller with his insight into Hindu ways and life rightly said that after Keshub had taken the first step of giving his consent to the marriage "he was more helpless than weak." The initial mistake that both Keshub and the Government made in this matter was not to take the full consent of the ladies of the Raj family in the matter from the beginning to the arrangements that they were making, or rather they should have been dealt with directly by Keshub. Their feelings and principles had as much right to be respected as those of Keshub, and it was but natural that they should press for the full ceremony. Besides inasmuch as marriage is considered to be the most auspicious occasion in life, the sanctity of the ceremony connected with it has been regarded with superstitious awe and anything left undone might be supposed to bring evil in its train. It is, also, not unlikely that Keshub's own wife, not to mention his daughter because of her minority, may not have looked at the whole question

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\* Life of Keshub.



entirely from the iconoclastic point of view of the Brahma Samaj. This is only a conjecture, but supposing it to be true, did she have no voice in the matter? Whatever it be, the marriage was performed, and the Government looking to the interests of Keshub's daughter as well as of the State declared it to be "Hindu in all essential features," and added that, "though in deference to the religious principles of the bride's father, idolatrous *mantras* were omitted,...care was, however, taken to retain whatever the Brahmins considered essential to the validity of the marriage."

All this was just what the opponents of Keshub were waiting for. It was the fulfilment of what they had predicted, and some of them did not fail to exaggerate things. Those who were long since working for the downfall of Keshub saw that their time had come, and they did not fail to make the most of it. It has been already said that they had formed a provisional Committee and had sent a letter of protest to Keshub some time before the marriage. They had also sent a circular letter to the Provincial Samajes, and they had as many as fifty Samajes out of about eighty with them in their disapprobation of the marriage. This was not all. Shastri says:\*

To keep the members of the Provincial Samajes informed about what was going on in Calcutta, the protestors soon started a Bengali weekly paper called *Samalochak*, or the Critic, and an English weekly paper called the *Brahma Public Opinion*. The two journals went on reporting from week to week what was being said and done in connection with the agitation.

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\* History of the Brahma Samaj.

They organised committees and meetings, and kept up the agitation with an energy and unity of action, which were surprizing and rarely witnessed before among them. The extremar section among them went the length of attributing to Keshub base motives and vilifying him in every possible way. Much of this work was done before the marriage took place, and as soon as the news of what had happened at Cuch Behar came, magnified and caricatured in the process of transmission, and by the willingness to believe everything against Keshub, they wanted to take extreme measures. Keshub offered to resign, but the opposing party was bent upon casting upon him the slur of deposition. A public meeting of the Calcutta Congregation was held, in which after much discussion and disorder amidst which Keshub left with his party, the 'protestors' as they came to be called about this time, in the midst of a great uproar deposed him and appointed five other men to minister to the congregation. From the appointment thus made it could be seen that they wished to give no quarter to either Keshub or to any of the missionaries except Bijay Krishna Goswamy who joined the protesting party at this time. From the way in which the protestors behaved at this time and for years more, one can plainly see that they were bent upon destroying all the influence of Keshub and doing irreparable injury to his name and reputation. Under these circumstances to allow the Brahma Samaj which was so largely the result of his work to go out of his hands may well have looked to Keshub like giving up a most important trust committed to his care by Providence. He must have felt this

all the more since he was fully conscious of the fact that under the leadership of the protesting party it could not but have a very secular character. Besides, he was not conscious of any great moral failure in connection with the marriage. Even his worst critics were constrained to say in spite of all their opposition to him only about five weeks after the marriage when all this dispute was going on :

Suffice it to say, that the protestors thought, the whole Brahma Public thought, Babu K. C. Sen to have fallen into a great mistake, but no one ever attributed any base motive for his action.\*

Thirty years after this, Pundit Shivnath Shastri, one of the principal members of the new party, thus gives his considered judgment :

It is proper to note at this stage that the protestors never questioned the sincerity of Mr. Sen's declaration that he acted from what he considered to be a divine command †

At its worst it was an error of judgment, and Keshub offered to resign. But this would not satisfy his opponents, and they, moreover, proceeded to make radical changes. On the other hand Keshub's own following, though smaller in number, was even against his resignation. At this stage Keshub exercised his right of ownership over the Mandir, probably as the Secretary of the Brahma Samaj, refusing the protestors the use thereof. Besides, the Mandir had not yet been made over to any Trustees, as there was still some debt on its account standing against Keshub's name. The protestors had

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\* The Brahma Public Opinion, April 18th, 1878.

† The History of the Brahma Samaj.

made some efforts to appoint Trustees, but it was only as late as 1877 that they came forward to take over the debt to themselves. Soon after the question of this marriage arose and thus the matter had to be left as it was. We are sorry to relate that even the aid of the police was called in to prevent the protestors from taking possession of the Mandir to which they thought they had a right. Almost the whole of the next Sunday after the above-mentioned meeting took place was passed in these "obnoxious tactics—on both sides, till the protestors tired out by the persistent opposition, left the field in despair and disgust."\* To this Pratap adds: "This made both sides wild and reckless, and the vilifications were worse than before. The protesting Brahmas established a rival prayer-meeting in the neighbourhood, and the next serious step they meditated was the organization of a new Brahma Samaj with an impersonal constitution, in which no single individual should have any marked ascendancy."

In all probability Keshub deserves blame for acting unconstitutionally and wrongly in this matter of exercising his power and right over the property of the Mandir. It was arbitrary and autocratic of him to do so, and was very like what Devendranath had done in the parent Samaj. It was perhaps worse inasmuch as Keshub had suffered from such injustice at the hands of the old patriarch. Moreover he had fought with the Maharshi on the ground of constitution, and now he was being fought with on the same ground. His present action is

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\* The Life of Keshub.

explicable, though not justifiable, only on the ground that he may have well believed the Brahma Samaj to be morally his, in view of his sacrifices, labours and influence over the missionaries and the general public. The Samaj had attained its high position solely due to his work and personality. It is, also, true that he himself had pressed for a constitution more than a decade back, but he had perhaps never had much faith, and especially since the revival at Mongyr had still less of it in constitutions or in the votes of the majority. It was different with those who opposed him. A very prominent member of that party, Babu Shiv Chunder Dev, with whom Pratap in his capacity as the Assistant Secretary of the Samaj had some correspondence at this time over the question of the proposed separate organization, wrote again and again in the following strain :

No doctrine ought to be promulgated as a doctrine of the Samaj which is not consented to by a majority of Brahmas. Nothing should pass as an act, or deed, or opinion of the Samaj until a majority of the members sanction it.

Indeed it was the same mentality that we came across in Akshay Kumar Dutt who proceeded to settle the question of the existence of a particular attribute in God by a show of hands. Only it was on a much larger scale now. Thus these two tendencies, the one secular and the other spiritual, had continued to grow in the Brahma Samaj, and the matters came to a head with this marriage. Their paths were far apart and for them to have remained together for so many years was perhaps a source of weakness to both the parties. It is not unlikely that the protestors, at any rate some of them,

may have been some time since thinking of taking some such step, but they were prevented from doing so owing to the ascendancy of Keshub's genius and character over the Brahma as well as the general public. Now they found their opportunity and they took it. Ever since this agitation began, which was before the celebration of the marriage, they had set themselves in right earnest to create public opinion, especially in the Samaj in their favour, and now they had about 170 out of 250 families favouring a separate organization. A public meeting was convened on the 14th May 1878, wherein was organized the *Sadharan Brahma Samaj*. Keshub, however, did send in his letter of protest to this meeting, on the ground that the Brahma Samaj of India "being an all-inclusive Church.....a schism in the true sense of sectarian exclusiveness, in the sense of doctrinal disunion, is a moral impossibility in the present case."\* The protestors, however, based their claim for starting this separate body on the ground of want of constitution in the Bharatvarshiya Brahma Samaj. Their main resolution was :

That this meeting deeply deplores the want of a constitutional organization in the Brahma Samaj and does establish a Samaj, to be called the *Sadharan Brahma Samaj*, with a view to remove the serious and manifold evils resulting from the state of things and to secure the representation of the views and the harmonious co-operation of the general Brahma Community, in all that affects the progress of the Theistic Church in India.†

Thus the Brahma Samaj was divided once more. As for the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj, though both

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\* Life of Keshub. † History of the Brahma Samaj.

Keshub and the protestors tried to keep up the continuity of their later efforts with it, yet it may be said to have come to an end. With this schism its national character was gone. During the last twenty years, from 1858 to 1878, the period that began with Keshub's advent into the Brahma Samaj, it had risen to be a truly National Church, and some of the very best men, not only of Bengal but of the whole country, had come into it. Although the number of Samajes at this time was not more than one hundred and twenty four, the name and the influence of the Brahma Samaj had penetrated even the remote corners of the country. Its indirect influence was even greater. Many of the movements of religious and social reform started during those days took their cue from it. Even the revivalistic movements were not free from this influence. Besides, it fostered the national consciousness to a very large extent in its earlier stages. The Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj was the first all-India body, and it was after it had worked for many years evoking thus a national consciousness that the Indian National Congress and the Indian Social Reform Conference came into existence. Sir Henry Cotton, a true friend of this country, in his book "New India" speaks of the universal sorrow and grief which prevailed over the country at the death of Keshub as the first manifestation of a national consciousness in the land. Of all men Keshub had contributed the most to the creation of the new Hindustan, and it was but right and fitting that the first sign of the existence of a New Hindustan should come at his passing away. It was but the tribute of his own work to his memory.

All this work was the result of Keshub's character and genius. That a rational movement like the Brahma Samaj assumed the form of a religious movement and came to wield so great an influence was due solely to his personality. But this was due to the fact that his genius was essentially religious and mystic. In him reason was subordinated to faith, and his teachings and life contained much that was positive. It was this which attracted people and gave power and life to his movement. He tried his utmost to make these positive elements in his personal religion and life an integral part of the Brahma Dharma, but in this he failed. The purely rationalist element in it proved too strong for him. He was increasingly feeling this to be a sort of drag on his spiritual powers. Two years before the Cuch Behar marriage, he said\* :

Whither is the Spirit of God leading India? Towards the Brahma Samaj? I say, no. To deny that Heaven is leading us onward to his holy Church would argue blind infidelity. You dare not deny that India is marching towards the Kingdom of Heaven. But the Brahma Samaj, as it is, is not God's holy Church: it has no semblance whatever of the Kingdom of Heaven. Verily, verily, the Brahma Samaj is a ridiculous caricature of the Church of God. Such an assertion may startle many here present, but it is nevertheless true. I should be the last person indeed to traduce or misrepresent my own Church. Surely it is not expected of me that I should in the least underrate or disparage the Brahma Samaj. Nay, I feel I am partial to my own Church.....But I can not suffer my partiality and fondness to run into blind bigotry and untruthful partizanship. I honestly tell you that this Church

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\* *Our Faith and Experiences* : Anniversary lecture of 1876.



I see before me to-day, known as the Church of Brahma or the Supreme God, satisfies not my highest ideal of the true and living Church of God.

These two elements, one rational and the other mystic, had been working for mastery in the Brahma Samaj, and as none of them succeeded to the full extent in giving the Samaj its character, they separated each to pursue its own path. Undoubtedly the Brahma Samaj lost its unity and strength by this separation, and consequently its position and influence in the country. But the fact is that the Samaj had reached its zenith some time before the Cuch Behar marriage, and its unity was more apparent than real. It had, also, ceased to attract people in the same way as it had in the earlier years. The Samaj as a religious movement of rational character had done all its work. Shastri records in his History that the progress of the Samaj had come to a standstill while Keshub was busy with those religious developments of his from the year 1875 onwards, and thereby he passes an unfavourable judgment on them. The truth of the matter, however, is that with Keshub, the deeper side of religion had begun to weigh more and more. He had come to feel, and rightly so, that it is only when one conquers himself that he can conquer others, or to put it better, only when one is saved he can save others. In the same lecture from which we have just quoted he said :

Would you believe that there is not throughout the length and breadth of the Brahma Samaj a single man or woman who has yet been saved? We have yet *to be*\* saved.

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\* The italics are his own.

We are marching towards salvation, but are very far from it. The Kingdom of Heaven is before, not behind. There is not one among us who can say, I have been saved. We are all in the bondage of iniquity, every one of us. There is none fully redeemed, no, none at all.

While he was thus entering deeper into personal and mystic religion, he came to see clearly that the Brahma Samaj was more a social community than a Church of God, that it was busy with outward forms and organizations borrowed from the West through a superficial acquaintance with it without knowing the best in its civilization, and that it was identified principally with social reform and rationalism rather than with higher religion. Keshub had already begun to feel that it was this which kept people away from the Samaj, and that the Brahma Samaj should change its character altogether, changing even its name if necessary if it was to be a Church of God in the true sense of the term. In the same lecture while speaking of the large numbers of people in the land who were Theists in belief, but who could not join the Samaj, he says :

I admit they are not all professed Brahmas. Many among them even hate the Brahma name. Nay, they renounce many of our doctrines and movements, and look upon many of our teachings and practices as altogether false.....Yet are they with us, fellow-members of the National Theistic Church. They may not subscribe to all the tenets of our theology, but its fundamental principles—Divine unity, man's immortality and accountability, they fully accept: idolatry and superstition they detest and abjure. Hence if not in name, in spirit they are all Brahmas or Theists. That they object to the Brahma name is perfectly immaterial so long as they think, believe and act as

Theists. *Verily there is no fascination in that name. I myself would, at this very moment, disclaim it, if necessary.* \*

Thus the Brahma Samaj was too individualistic, rationalistic and Western to suit the Hindu mind. Keshub himself had contributed not a little towards its being this, but much of it was there in spite of him. The period during which it flourished was one of great social and religious ferment, and Keshub's character provided dynamics for all-round reform which bordered on revolution. At its heart all his work was deeply moral and religious, and it directed for good the new aspirations and activities that had sprung forth owing to the impact of the West on the civilization of the land. But the revolutionary reform which he had inspired and guided was not without its excesses, and these cost him ultimately his life. The Cuch Behar marriage was not the chief cause of the separation between the two parties: it only provided the occasion for it. The Brahma Samaj was divided because of this rationalistic individualism in it, and the same has been the cause of its ultimate ruin.

But Keshub's work was not yet over. It was as it were out of the ashes of the Brahma Samaj that there arose Phoenix-like the Ideal of the New Dispensation, which is one of the most remarkable religious discoveries of modern times. In it were emphasized and developed all those personal, mystic and oriental elements which had been such an eye-sore to many in the Brahma Samaj. Its chief peculiarity was the great idea of the Harmony and Unity of all Religions, an idea which is finding acceptance in an increasing measure all over the world.

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\* The italics are ours.

## Chapter VIII

## THE CHURCH OF THE NEW DISPENSATION

## I

The immediate effect on Keshub's very sensitive mind of the schism and the persecutions to which he was subjected was one of intense mental strain which brought on a very serious illness. This lasted for two or three months after which he gradually recovered. It was during the period of convalescence that he conceived the idea of having a big revival. The incident is thus referred to by Pratap :

One evening while Keshub lay in bed, and we had proceeded far into the excitement of such a talk, he suddenly got up and said, there must be a great and unprecedented Revival, if the Brahma Samaj is to tide over the present crisis. In devotions, disciplines, doctrines and missionary activities, there should be introduced, all along the line such a spirit of Revival as had never yet been seen. We all concurred in the idea, but we did not perceive that what Keshub said was the result of long intense meditation and much earnest prayer, that it boded a kind of activity for which none was prepared. \*

As to the aims that this Revival was to set before itself, Pratap adds :

When therefore Keshub spoke of a Revival in 1879, he meant a further advance, a greater advance than had been ever made before, on the lines of a new revelation, a new life, altogether a new departure. He felt that the tendency of a large body of men in the Brahma Samaj had been for a long time to dissociate themselves from him. These were now chiefly the protesting Brahmas who judged his conduct and principles in relation to the Cuch Behar marriage in a hypercritical spirit.

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\* The Life of Keshub.

He felt he had completely failed to carry the whole Brahma Samaj with him in this matter. And he determined to give his part of the movement a unique character by accentuating the principles of faith and culture, which had been pursued by him and his friends for many years previously. He felt perfectly assured that the higher truths and spiritualities upon which he had lived and taught his followers to live, would in the end leaven the whole Brahma Samaj, and the Revival which he contemplated would in time be the regeneration of the entire Theistic Church of India.

This was done by the establishment and development of the church of the New Dispensation. The idea of the New Dispensation was not at all new in the Brahma Samaj. Keshub had given expression to it some years ago and he was gradually expounding it to his disciples and to the Brahma Samaj also. In his anniversary lecture of 1875—Behold the Light of Heaven in India—he used the word *New Dispensation* several times. He had come to feel that a religion worthy of the name must be a Revelation or a Dispensation of God. He had also felt the hand of Providence all through the history of the Brahma Samaj which was raised up by God to lead the country out of darkness and idolatry to His own light and kingdom. This meant a new emphasis on God's part of the work in Religion in general, and it brought in its train a new attitude towards all the religions of the world. In fact it gave a new meaning to the entire history of man, and filled it with a content hitherto undreamt of in the Brahma Samaj. As regards the relation of this New Dispensation to other Religions Keshub said :

What I accept as the new dispensation in India neither shuts God's light from the world, nor does it run counter to any

of those marvellous dispensations of His mercy which were made in ancient times. It only shows a new adaptation of His eternal goodness, an Indian version and affiliation of his universal love. In accepting this light we do not set up or claim a monopoly of the treasure of heaven in behalf of our country. We only contend for this, that the same Fatherly care which feeds all mankind is feeding my country in a special manner in a most critical period of its history. Surely India needs a special dispensation to save her. God alone knows how to save India. \*

He adds :

A new Dispensation, therefore, has been sent unto us which presents to us, not indeed a new and singular creed, but a new development of by-gone dispensations. The divine message sent to India, far from clashing with anything communicated to man by God in ancient times, fulfills all that has been said before. It comes not to destroy but to fulfil the Law and Prophets. And while it is a consummation of the teachings of the past, it sows the seed of future dispensations.

The Revival that came now progressed along the lines laid down here. He had already done some work in accordance with the principles mentioned here, especially when he classified his disciples into various orders and gave some of them the task of making a special study of the main religions. But all such work had to be done very cautiously owing to the intense opposition that he had to encounter in the Samaj itself. The position was now changed and he could do what he wanted with greater freedom. Besides a new impulse and a new energy had now taken hold of him, and he tried to put the same into the heart of his followers so that the whole

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\* "Behold the Light of Heaven in India" the anniversary lecture of 1875.

of Hindustan might be regenerated through them. Though the New Dispensation was not formally proclaimed before 1880, Keshub began to make elaborate preparations for it from this time. This was done by means of deepening the spiritual life of them all and a larger missionary activity. Incidentally we might say that herein lay the difference between the Maharshi and Keshub. Whereas the former retired from life almost altogether after the first schism the latter became more active than ever. Many of the old institutions which had fallen into decay were revived, and new ones of a more religious character, especially for women and children, were started. The mission-work was done more and more on lines that would appeal to the common mass of people, and street-singing and street-preaching were resorted to much more than before.

In 1879, during the course of the anniversary festival, Keshub gave his annual lecture on "Am I an inspired Prophet?" He was led to do this because of the great misrepresentations in connection with the Cuch Behar marriage. It was alleged that Keshub wanted to arrogate to himself the honour of a prophet because of his plea of *adesh* (inspiration) in regard to the marriage. To this charge he replied by saying that he was neither a prophet nor a saint but a sinner. He had been, however, endowed by Providence with a singular faith which had been the guide of all his actions ever since his youth. The inspiration or *adesh* in question, he took care to explain, was no extraordinary gift granted to him from above but was within the easy reach of all who would aspire after and pray for it. He regarded

this inspiration, which is only a definite response of God to prayer, as essential to religious life. He said he was commissioned by God to preach certain truths and he was bound to fulfil his mission in spite of all the hostility he had met or might meet with. The lecture was a bold challenge thrown out to the world, and more particularly to his critics in defence not of his conduct so much as of his favourite doctrine, which he considered vital to religion and which he had expounded as far back as 1873\*. It is needless to say that what he said therein was widely criticized.

Soon after this during the Easter season he gave another lecture on "India asks, Who is Christ? This was a bigger stumbling-block to his critics. Thirteen years back in his lecture "Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia," he had spoken of the extraordinary humanity of Jesus : in this he proclaimed his divinity, though not in the same sense as the Christians do. Besides, whereas in the first lecture he had taken an ethical and cultural view of the mission of Christ, in this he understands the same in a religious and mystic manner. But this was not all. In this he tries to lay the foundation of that harmony of Hinduism and Christianity, which became henceforth the most characteristic feature of his teaching. He interprets the life and teachings of Jesus Christ from the Vedantic standpoint. He takes care to show, however, that Christ corrects that teaching where it has gone wrong, especially in its pantheistic interpretation of the universe, and thus fulfills in a perfect way the deep

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\* "Inspiration " Anniversary lecture of that year.



craving of the Hindu heart after absolute union with the Deity. This lecture did not represent his final thoughts on the subject, but it at any rate showed the direction in which his mind was moving. One of the significant passages in the lecture is :

You will find on reflection that the doctrine of divine humanity is essentially a Hindu doctrine, and the picture of Christ's life and character I have drawn is altogether a picture of ideal Hindu life. Surely, the idea of absorption and immersion in the Deity is one of those ideas of Vedantic Hinduism which prevail extensively in India. From the highest sage to the humblest peasant, millions of men in this land believe in the pantheistic doctrine of man's identity with the Godhead. The most illiterate man is heard to say he and the Lord are one ! The doctrine of absorption in the Deity is India's creed, and through this idea, I believe India will reach Christ. Will he not fulfil the Indian Scripture ? I am reminded of the passage in the Gospel in which he says—"I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The Mosaic Dispensation only ? Perhaps the Hindu Dispensation also. The earliest scriptures of our nation are full of pantheism, and though there are errors therein, the truth of pantheism will be fulfilled and perfected in Christ. The religion of our ancestors was pantheism from beginning to end. But what is Hindu pantheism ? Essentially it is nothing but the identification of all things with God. I do not mean that you should adopt pantheism as it exists in Hindu books. Far from it. Oh ! there are mischievous errors and absurd ideas mixed up with it, which you must eschew. Christ's pantheism is a pantheism of a loftier and more perfect type. It is the conscious union of the human with the Divine Spirit in truth, love and joy. The Hindu sage realizes this union only during meditation, and he seeks conscious absorption in his God, with all his faults and shortcomings about him. His will is not at

one with the will of God. But Christ's communion is active and righteous : it combines purity of character with devotion. Hindu pantheism in its worst form is proud, being based upon the belief that man is God. It is quietism and trance. Christ's pantheism is the active self-surrender of the will. It is the union of the obedient, humble and loving son with the father..... In Christ you see true pantheism. You, my countrymen, can not help accepting Christ in the spirit of your national scriptures.

It is not a mere coincidence that Keshub, immediately after the two great crises in his life and that of the Brahma Samaj, should appear before the public as an original exponent of Christ's life and teachings. The sole reason of this was that the subject was one of paramount importance with him, and he had come to regard the proper presentation of Christ to his country as the special mission of his life. When he spoke first in 1866, the agitation consequent thereupon was so great that he thought that the country was not prepared for the acceptance of Christ. In a letter that he wrote then to his friend Pratap, he said: "Unless I can live Jesus to some extent at least, I can not talk Jesus. Nor could I undertake to preach Jesus to my countrymen till I am fully persuaded that the time has come for such preaching. In other words I must be fit, and the age must be fit, before I can wield the sword which that inspired Prophet brought with him into the world. Of course I have my own ideas about Christ, but I am not bound to give them out, until altered circumstances of the country gradually develop them out of my mind. Jesus is identical with self-sacrifice, and as he lived and preached in the fulness of time, so must he be in turn preached in the fulness of time. The more is sacrifice

needed in India, and the more it is made, the more will Jesus find a home in this land. I am, therefore, patiently waiting that I may grow with the age and the nation, and the spirit of Christ's sacrifice grow therewith."

Although what he said of Christ in 1879 may not have been present to his mind when he wrote that letter, we can safely say that he had much more in mind than what he gave out then. He waited thirteen years before he broke his reserve on the subject, meanwhile preparing himself and his immediate followers, if not the whole of the Brahma Samaj, by living Jesus. The schism roused his inmost spiritual nature, and he began his mission of preaching Christ to his countrymen in right earnest, and continued it to the very end. Already the Brahma Samaj had learnt a number of lessons of moral and spiritual life, lessons of primary importance, from the life and teachings of Jesus, but now he wanted to master the entire secret of the life of Christ. Thus Keshub was, whether consciously or unconsciously, all the while preparing for this mission of his life, and in that very act he had prepared the minds of some of the best of men, not only in the Brahma Samaj but in the country at large, to receive readily some of his latest teaching on Christ. In regard to this only a few months after this lecture was given Keshub said:

Our regard for Christ is not at all of a philosophical or historical character. It is not literary interest that draws us to him. The affinity that binds us to him is moral and spiritual and not intellectual. We love Jesus, because we find in him those elements of truth and character which we have so long cultivated with special care and earnestness in our own lives,

and which we prize most highly. The fact is, the Brahma Samaj of India has, ever since its organization, thrown itself into a special line of religious development which is so peculiar that none can possibly mistake its nature. These very elements of character, faith, asceticism, communion and practical moral obedience are the distinguishing features of Christ's life. Hence it is that such a life soon proved, by the natural law of affinity, peculiarly attractive to the Progressive Brahma, and his love for Jesus increased in proportion to his growth in the above virtues.... The Brahma Samaj can not have the least doubt that Christ was a model man, a model Theist, in so far as he attained to that high degree of communion in which the soul is lost in Divinity. All the teachings and doings of that prophet, his prayers and aspirations, his life and death, all point to him as such.\*

The ideal of life presented in this lecture, as continually corrected and expanded, came to have much spiritual significance for Keshub and his followers. It became, henceforth, for them the subject of their religious *Sadhana*. But this was not all. In it Keshub, also, laid the foundation of the doctrine of the Harmony of Religions, which came to be almost synonymous with New Dispensation. Keshub was holding up Christ to be the fulfiller of Hinduism, thereby harmonizing both Hinduism and Christianity, which are the best and the most representative products of the Aryan and Jewish cultures respectively. So original was this work of his that even his great, perhaps the greatest critic, Pundit Shrivnath Shastri is constrained to say :

† One thing seemed to be characteristic and noteworthy. On the one hand, Mr. Sen's admiration for Christ and Christian ideals was never so great as at this time, as was

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\* *The Indian Mirror*, 1879.

† History of the Brahma Samaj.

instanced by his lecture on "India asks, who is Christ : " on the other he opened his mind, now more than ever before, to many of the old ideals of orthodox Hinduism, thereby showing the catholicity and all-comprehensive universalism of the faith he now propagated. He was slowly preparing for some of the remarkable features of his New Dispensation, which he began to preach from the next year.

The year 1880 opened with the proclamation of the New Dispensation. The public and especially the Brahma Samaj had been prepared for this by a variety of new teachings and practices, all worked out with an enthusiasm almost unsurpassed in the history of the Samaj. During the course of the anniversary festival, which was prolonged from one to three weeks, Keshub tried his utmost to bring home to the mind of his followers the fact that God as *Mother* was in their midst in a special sense for the purpose of their salvation as well as that of the country. This was not, as said before, a new teaching : only the emphasis was greater. In his anniversary lecture "God-vision in the Nineteenth Century", we find a rich religious experience which was the outcome of his new *Sadhana*. Therein he re-states his Theism as the background of the New Dispensation in a highly idealistic and glowing manner. One of the characteristic passages is :

This is the philosophy of God-vision in modern times. It is a vision in which Divinity and heaven are realized together. As you open the spiritual eye the glory of heaven bursts upon the view, and you see all the blessed martyrs and saints clinging to the Lord their God as so many secondary spirit-forces clustering round the primary force. As on earth, men and women, beasts, birds and creeping things, and myriads of inanimate objects, are kept up and consequently quickened by Divine force, so in heaven all departed saints are

sustained by God's animating force, the source of all things here and above, the fountain of all life and vitality. He is heaven itself, for in his living force is held the entire confraternity of blessed saints and martyrs of ancient and modern times.

This vision of all the prophets and saints in God is to him the spiritual counterpart of the Science of Comparative Religion which had just come into existence.

Besides, a very important feature of the New Dispensation was the belief in God as Mother. There was a new and deepened emphasis on the Motherhood of God, and this brought with it a tenderness and sweetness not known before. With this came a greater respect and reverence for Womanhood and Childhood. Special efforts were made to draw women and children into the religious life of the new community by such vows as *Seeta\*-Vrata*, *Savitrit†-Vrata* and others. The men also were enjoined to cultivate, by vows and other means, essentially feminine virtues such as tenderness, meekness and fidelity. The worship of the goddess-mother Kali or Durga or Amba has been at all times common among Hindus, and Paramhansa Ramkrishna exemplified it at its highest. But this was associated even in his case with materialistic associations, and at its worst it has been accompanied by gruesome rites and animal sacrifices. While Keshub took the idea of the Motherhood of God from the people round about him and was perhaps indebted to the Paramhansa in a

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\* Seeta the wife of Rama has always been regarded as an ideal wife by the Hindus, and now this vow was meant to cultivate similar nature in women

† Savitri is another example of great fidelity to one's husband.

special sense for it, he so elevated it that even the latter was constrained to say that no sooner did he come close to Keshub than his Mother (*Kali*) was absorbed into the Spirit-God.

What Keshub did in regard to this idea, he tried to do in regard to all the leading ideas of various religions. The rationale of the process he adopted in this matter is to be found in what he said with reference to his new attitude towards Idolatry viz.: "The Theist rejects the image, but he can not dispense with the spirit of which that image is the form: the revival of the spirit, the destruction of the form, is the work of the New Dispensation." It is not unlikely that Keshub at times may have gone too far in some of these things, but that was only the result of a temporary reaction, and he soon recovered from such excess. For instance, he certainly went to an extreme in his eclecticism when he said during the course of this year, that "our position is not that truths are to be found in all religions, but that all the established religions of the world are true." But he redressed the balance later on by presenting this eclecticism as Christo-centric. His main efforts, however, were devoted to rationalizing and idealizing the various religions. It was indeed a great attempt, possibly unsurpassed in the history of the world, for the simple reason that it is in our own times that such a vast field of religious survey and study has been opened. Pratap, while describing these attempts of his, said :—

\* The problems of comparative theology, which the savants of the West have attempted to solve during the last

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\*. The Life of Keshub.

quarter of a century by research and philosophy, he tried to solve by devotional fervour, intense meditation, spiritual discipline and moral culture.

It was in order to "coin into flesh and blood as it were, the religious ideas that have been held in all religious and ecclesiastical history"\* he went through himself along with his disciples such ceremonies as Baptism, *Homa* (Sacrifice), the Sacrament of the Last Supper and several others.

One of the most novel as well as fruitful means of spiritual culture that he employed at this time, was called "Pilgrimage to Saints and Prophets". It was a sort of subjective communion held with them in order to assimilate the inner meaning of their teachings and life. After a week's preparation, these pilgrimages began in the course of which these devotees of the New Dispensation roamed over the religious history of the world regardless of time and space. Beginning with Moses, they held communion with Socrates, the Hindu Rishis, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammad, Chaitanya and others including Faraday, Carlyle and Emerson. The idea underlying these pilgrimages is thus explained by Keshub:

They are simply practical applications of this principle of subjectivity. As pilgrims we approach the great saints, and commune with them in spirit, killing the distance of time and space. We enter into them and they enter into us. In our souls we cherish them, and we imbibe their characters and principles. We are above the popular error which materializes the spirits of departed saints, and clothes them again with the

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\* From the Presidential Address of Dr. Nil Ratan Sarkar, a leading member of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, given in the Theistic Conference of the year 1915.



flesh and bones which they have for ever cast away. Nor do we hold these human spirits to be omnipresent..... Whatever they may be, it is possible for us, earthly pilgrims, if we are only men of faith and prayer, to realize them in consciousness. If they are not personally present with us, they may be spiritually drawn into our life and character. They may be made to live and grow in us.

The purpose of Keshub in instituting these pilgrimages and doing much else that he did at this time was to make his movement as positive in its attitude towards Great Men as he could. This was in striking contrast to those who had separated from him. Their attitude towards Prophets was largely negative, and their superstitious dread of superstition was too strong to allow them to think sanely on these matters. It is not unlikely that some of them thought the term 'Great Man' an insult to their humanity. On the other hand Keshub thought that there could never be too much of respect and reverence for them. In regard to this many years after Shastri said :

\*No man has ever surpassed Keshub Chunder Sen in reverence for the great masters. He literally bowed himself down to the very dust as it were before them. This reverence was the fountain in him of spiritual impulse and inspiration.

The anniversary festival of the year 1881 was made to last for a full month and was celebrated with unusual enthusiasm and solemnity. New ceremonies such as the Arti and the Flag ceremony formed a part of it, and there was an interesting and attractive programme suited to all and sundry. While performing the Flag ceremony Keshub said :

Behold the flag of the New Dispensation ! The silken flag is crimson with the blood of martyrs. It is the flag of the

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\* History of the Brahma Samaj.

Great King of Heaven and Earth, the one supreme Lord... Be-  
hold the spirits of all the prophets and saints of heaven assem-  
bled overhead, a holy confraternity in whose union is the har-  
mony of faith, hope and joy. And at the foot of the holy  
standard are the scriptures of the Hindus, Christians, Moham-  
medans and Buddhists, the sacred repositories of the wisdom of  
ages, and the inspiration of saints, our light and our guide. Four  
scriptures are here united in blessed harmony under the shadow  
of this flag. Here is put together the international fellowship  
of Asia, Europe, Africa and America. Here is the harmony of  
the mind, and the heart, the soul and the will, of knowledge  
and love, of devotion and duty. Glory unto God in the highest!  
Honour to all prophets and saints in heaven, and to all scrip-  
tures on earth! Unto the New Dispensation victory!

We have another description of what the New Dis-  
pensation is in these words:

Such is the New Dispensation. It is the harmony of all  
scriptures and prophets and dispensations. It is not an isolated  
creed, but the science which binds and explains and harmonizes all  
religions. It gives to history a meaning, to the action of Provi-  
dence a consistency, to quarrelling churches a common bond and  
to successive dispensations a continuity. It shows by marvellous  
synthesis how the different rainbow colours are one in the light  
of heaven. The New Dispensation is the sweet music of diverse  
instruments. It is the precious necklace in which are strung  
together the rubies and pearls of all ages and climes. It is the  
celestial court where around enthroned Divinity shine the lights  
of all heavenly saints and prophets. It is the wonderful solvent,  
which absorbs all that is true and good and beautiful in the  
objective world. Before the flag of the New Dispensation tow  
ye nations, and proclaim the Fatherhood of God and the Brother-  
hood of man. In blessed eucharist let us eat and assimilate all the

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\* The anniversary lecture of 1881, "We, the Apostles of the  
New Dispensation."

saints and prophets of the world. Thus shall we put on the new man, and each of us will say, the Lord Jesus is my will, Socrates my head, Chaitanya my heart, the Hindu Rishi my soul, and the philanthropic Howard my right hand. And thus transformed we shall bear witness unto the New Gospel. Let many-sided truth, incarnate in saints and prophets, come down from heaven and dwell in you, that you may have that blessed harmony of character in which is eternal life and salvation.

These are characteristic passages and they show very well in what grooves of thought his mind was moving during this period. The chief notes of this New Dispensation are three, and they are (1) Immediacy (2) Synthesis and (3) Subjectivity. The first of these had been dealt with at length in his lecture "God-vision in the Nineteenth Century," and that was what the Brahma Samaj had stood for all the time. The other two were new, and Keshub explained them at length in the anniversary lecture of the same year. With regard to Synthesis his words are these :

Come, then, to the synthetic unity of the New Dispensation. You will see how all other dispensations are harmonized and unified in this, a whole host of churches resolved into a synthetic unity. In the midst of the multiplicity of dispensations in the world there is a concealed unity, and it is of the highest importance to us all that we should discover it with the light of logic and science. For science and salvation are one thing, and the highest Unity and Deity are identical. Who can count the many churches in the world with their endless divisions and sub-divisions? Tangled in the folds of perplexing polemics, the world sees no way of escape, and in plaintive strains cries—Who will come to my rescue? Only science can deliver

the world, and bring light and order out of the chaos and darkness of multiplied churches. If there is science in all things, is there no science in the dispensations of God? Do these alone in God's creation stand beyond the reign of law and order?..... Sure I am that amid their apparent anomalies and contradictions there is a logical unity of idea and method, and an unbroken continuity of sequence. All these dispensations of God are connected with each other in the economy of Providence. They are linked together in one continuous chain, which may be traced to the earliest age. They are a concatenated series of ideas, which show a systematic evolution of thought and development of religious life.

With regard to Subjectivity he said :

The New Dispensation aims at synthesis, and it aims at subjectivity. It endeavours to convert outward facts and characters into facts of consciousness. It believes that God is an objective reality, an Infinite Person, the Supreme Father. In the same manner it believes in the objectivity of all prophets and departed spirits, each a person, a child of God. But the recognition of the objective side of truth is not the whole of philosophy or theology. There is a subjective side as well. We have done a great deal for the former. The latter demands an equally faithful recognition : nay, it ought to excite a much warmer interest. For subjectivity is of the first importance to the wants of the soul. For who among us does not believe in the outward and objective God? And yet how few among professing Theists realize Divinity in their own hearts? God is not only a person, but also a character. As a person we worship Him : His divine character we must assimilate to our own character. True worship is not completed till the worshipper's nature is converted so as to partake of the nature of Divinity. Worship is fruitless if it does not make us heavenly and divine. The transfer of the outward Deity to subjective consciousness is the maturity of faith,

the last fact of salvation.....You must put God into your inmost souls. In regard to the spirits of departed saints the same argument holds good. If you simply admit their entity, of what avail is it to you? You have no doubt heard of such a thing as the communion of saints. What is it? Is it the superficial doctrine of objective recognition or is it the deeper philosophy of subjective fellowship?.....It is this philosophy of subjectivity which underlies the Pilgrimages to saints as they are called.

It is undoubted that under the influence of these ideas, Keshub did a piece of work which was an original contribution to the religious life of the world. The whole of humanity owes not a small debt to him for greater toleration, sympathy and respect for religions other than one's own that we find in it to-day. As for his own life, this was the most creative period thereof. The same is true of the Brahma Samaj also.

It was during the course of the year 1881, that Keshub performed the ceremonies of Baptism, the Lord's Supper and *Homa* (sacrifice). The first two of these he tried to assimilate to the spirit and genius of the Hindu race by removing from them their strictly Western associations and thus reviving their original oriental character. The *Homa* he spiritualized by removing from it all its idolatrous associations. One of the most important ceremonies, however, of this period was the *Ordination of the Apostles* of the New Dispensation, held in March 1881. Keshub had already proclaimed himself and his immediate disciples as Apostles\* and had organized what was called the *Apostolical Durbar*, a sort of permanent

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\* "We Apostles of the New Dispensation" was the title of the anniversary lecture of 1881.

Missionary Conference. Now he thought of ordaining these including himself in a regular manner. The ceremony in the case was "most touching," to quote the words of Pratap.\* Twelve out of nearly double that number were chosen, their feet were washed by Kanti Chunder Mitra, one of the missionaries who was in charge of the support of the missionaries and their families, and the vow was administered to them by Gour Govind Roy.† The ceremony has been thus described probably by Keshub himself : ‡

He (Gour Govind Roy) presented to the minister a medal, which he reverently accepted and wore on his person. Then followed the presentation of a stick and a scrip, both national symbols of mendicancy. Dressed in §*gairic* with head shaved, the Servant of the Apostles (Keshub) humbly received these, and asked for alms. Thereupon rice and vegetables were put into the small bag, which he held in his hand as a mendicant. The ceremony which was impressive, and moved many to tears, was the beginning of thirty days of mendicancy, during which the Servant of the Apostles was pledged to live exclusively upon alms, in the shape of rice, dal, salt, oil, vegetables, fruits etc, with which kind friends might favour him. A few more medals were then presented, and there was the laying on of hands in each case, indicative of Apostolic Succession. The ceremony concluded with a charge to the Apostles, prayers and benediction.

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\* The Life of Keshub.

† For his great knowledge of the Hindu Shastras he was very useful in all such work. He was a sort of priest of the new community.

‡ The *New Dispensation Journal*, a weekly which was started by Keshub in 1881.

§ The saffron-coloured cloth worn commonly by Sadhus.

The charge that Keshub gave to the Apostles contained among other things these words :

Honour me not as your master. I am your servant, I am your friend, you are my masters. Therefore what treatment a servant may expect from his masters and a friend from his friends I do expect from you. I am your God-sent servant, and my Father has often told me that if I leave your service my salvation will be hindered. Therefore do not in mercy remove me from the post of your servant. My Heavenly Master hath employed me in your service, therefore I must be lowly, and have no cause to be puffed up with vanity. I do not send you as the great prophet Jesus sent his disciples. Our mutual relations are of a different kind. I am only one of your band. You are sent forth by the world's prophets and apostles. You and I are sent forth by Jesus, Sakya Muni, Chaitanya and other great prophets. They have sent us forth into the world to preach their truths. Taking the dust of their feet I tell you these words. You are not my apostles, but both you and I are their apostles. They are our spiritual fathers and grandfathers. We are born in the line of their generation. We are twice-born in their inspiration. Before I acknowledged you as apostles those heavenly prophets had ordained you and sent you as such. I only repeat their words to their disciples. In this very room, in your hearts those God-sent prophets are present, and they call you to their work. They tell you to take into your heart the sufferings of sinful and sorrowful men. Your brothers and sisters are sinking in the sea of atheism and impiety.....Our Supreme Mother, the Mother of all Prophets also commands you thus:—Apostles of the New Dispensatson, go and save my children. Lo ! scepticism and vice are destroying them. Run to their rescue with all your might. If you have any love for your Heavenly Mother, go and save her children.

The rest of the charge is modelled on that of Christ to his apostles. The part quoted is the introduction thereto, and shows clearly in what relation Keshub stood to the other Apostles. He claimed no higher position than that of a brother-apostle, as one of them, not as one who was above them. If he was their leader, it was not in the same sense as the prophets were. About a week after this ordination, some of them were sent out to long distances, on mission-tours from which one of the noblest of them, Aghore Nath Gupta,\* known as Sadhu Aghore for his great saintliness of character, never returned. Those of the missionaries who were not ordained as apostles were called their associates. In addition to these about twenty-five men belonging to the New Dispensation Church all over the country, were accepted as lay-preachers. A new order of *Grihasta Vairagis*, Ascetic House-holders, was instituted, and five men took the vow as such. There were orders instituted for women also, the chief one of them being a kind of Sister-hood meant to promote among them a higher life of devotion and service. Even boys and girls were not forgotten, and they had vows administered to them suitable to their age and temperament. The idea behind all these vows, ceremonies and orders was to make the New Dispensation as much of a reality as possible to every individual member, man or woman, boy or girl, of the little community, and to develop the religious character of all of them as fully as possible.

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\* He was entrusted with the task of studying Buddhism. He wrote a Life of Buddha in Bengali. He died too early to do much in his special line.



One of the chief activities of Keshub himself at this time was to edit a paper called *The New Dispensation*, that was just started. Week by week it came out full of new matter, and all his leading ideas were fully discussed therein \*. He threw himself into the task of studying the deeper phases of both Hinduism and Christianity, and busied himself with questions most abstruse and recondite. In this study of his, on the one hand of the Christian Fathers, especially of the first three centuries, and on the other of the Rishis and the Acharyas of the Vedic and Pauranic Hinduism, he found much that was common to both the faiths. He found much else that he thought shed further light on each other. It was indeed a great movement of thought and feeling which he had originated, and he was now maintaining it with all his strength. In some respects it was very much like some of those great movements which have been associated with the Neo-Platonists or the Alexandrian School. He wanted verily to fuse all religions, especially Hinduism and Christianity as the most typical ones among them, by what may be called the alchemy of his prayerfulness, devotion and spirituality, and he spared neither himself nor any one else in his endeavour to achieve this purpose. So great were his passion and his efforts in this matter that even Shastri is constrained to say :†

He wanted to show that the New Dispensation could imbibe and include all of them (religions), thereby producing a

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\* Some of the most important articles that appeared in this paper have since been published in two volumes, called 'The New Dispensation, or the Religion of Harmony.' These are a mine of thought and would be found very helpful to all students of Religion.

† History of the Brahma Samaj.

wonderful unity of purpose and an all-comprehensive spiritual kinship. That vision possessed him like a passion during this period and drew him into an ever-increasing effort for its realization. Indeed the earnestness and persistency with which he preached and practised it resembled the fire and fervour of a prophet of old.

The maturest result of all this thought and prayer was given in his anniversary lecture of 1882, called "That Marvellous Mystery, the Trinity." This is, indeed, one of his greatest lectures. His treatment of the subject is not quite free from some vestige of rationalism and hence it falls short of the highest thought on it, but nevertheless he reaches in it the high-water-mark of the harmony and unity of all religious thinking in the world. In his lecture "India asks, Who is Christ" he had shown Christ to be the fulfiller of Hinduism. In this he goes further and identifies Jesus Christ with the Word of God, and says that He is the Light of all Religions and it is in Him and through Him that all Religions and Prophets are one. Besides, he therein declared his Dispensation to be that of the Holy Spirit, the same which had been spoken of by Jesus Christ and by St. Paul.

It was during the anniversary festival of this year that Keshub's health broke down seriously, the fell disease of diabetes was diagnosed in him, and it had already made much advance. The two years more that Keshub lived were years of serious illness and acute suffering alternated with strenuous efforts to carry on the work which he had begun. During this period he went more than once to the Himalayas where he found

rest and peace from worry, though not health and strength. Under the inspiration of the sacred associations of these Hills, he engaged himself in such things as were meant to give the finishing touch to his work and movement. Besides, he found there ample opportunity to develop and practise thoughts and ideals of *Yoga* to which his attention had been drawn years ago. It was on the Himalayas that he wrote his *Nava Samhita* (New Law of Life), and *Yoga, Subjective and Objective*.\*

When he was in Calcutta he busied himself with setting up what he called the New Dispensation Theatre and getting there represented a drama entitled *Nava Brindaban*.† This work took months and the drama was not put on the stage until the middle of September 1883. The drama was meant to illustrate the idea of the New Dispensation, and thus to make it more acceptable to the common people. Keshub himself and the missionaries took part in it, and it had a wholesome influence upon the people who witnessed it. Keshub also introduced what was called the *New Dance*. Dancing has been known to be an accompaniment of *Bhakti* among the Hindus for ages, particularly as it is a natural expression of the outflow of the feelings of the heart. As such it had been already introduced into the Brahma Samaj ever since the *Bhakti* revival of 1866. But now Keshub wanted to develop it and make it more systematic, in fact make it something

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\* This appeared at first in the *New York Independent*, but has since been published as a book.

† *Brindaban* is a famous place of pilgrimage for the *Vaishnavas*. The idea underlying this name is the same as that of New Jerusalem.

of that well-known form of it, called the *Ras*, with this difference, however, that it was strictly confined to men. Keshub's idea was to make the religion of the New Dispensation a religion of the masses and the common people, the poor and the ignorant, and it was to serve this purpose that he introduced these things. Almost ever since the second schism, street-singing and street-preaching had formed a special feature of his work and now dramatic representations and dances were added. Thus while Keshub, on the one hand, was trying to rationalize and spiritualize the various religions of the world, on the other he was doing his very best to make his religion which was the harmony and unity of all these religions as simple and poetic as possible so that even the man in the street might understand it. The large variety of rites and symbols, ceremonies and sacraments, that were introduced were meant to serve this double purpose viz., to realize by experiment the inner import of them and to convey what was thus found to others, even to the whole of Hindustan, in as picturesque and realistic a manner as possible.

The year 1883 opened with a most significant message addressed to the world by Keshub. This he did by means of a *New Year's Day Epistle*. The message that he gave therein was one "of peace and love, of harmony and reconciliation" through the New Dispensation which had dawned upon the world. As one of its Apostles he called upon the world to accept it. The same idea was elaborated in his anniversary lecture, the last of his great orations, very significantly styled "Asia's Message to Europe." Therein he speaks as a representative of

Asia, and appeals to Europe in the name of the New Dispensation and of Jesus Christ, to sheathe the sword of sectarianism, and to unite with Asia, the mother of all the great Religions, in the true spirit of At-one-ment with God and Man such as Christ had shown in his life and death. This lecture is one of his greatest, and it marks him out as a true prophet in view of the Euro—Asiatic situation to-day and the all-Asiatic consciousness which has been springing up in the various countries of Asia.

The series of great lectures that began with "Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia" ends very properly with this one "Asia's Message to Europe\* ". The very remarkable advance that Keshub made during a little more than a decade and half that intervened, and at the same time the great harmony that exists between his first stage and the last, can be well understood by a comparison of these two lectures. While in the first he tried to solve the practical and cultural problem of Hindustan, in the latter he attempted to solve the religious problem of the world. In both he puts forward Jesus Christ as the centre of harmony and unity, and in the last he declares Him also to be the Centre of his own Church.

This year was the last one of Keshub's life, and the only thing of importance he could do owing to the very serious condition of his health was the writing of the *Nava Samhita* and *Yoga, Subjective and*

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\* An attempt has been made by the present writer to trace the development in Keshub's thought in his book "*Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen.*"

*Objective.* These books contain some of his last thoughts on subjects which were nearest to his heart, and reveal him as a Yogi as well as an *Acharya* (Teacher), whose life-work was to cultivate communion with God and to create a community of fellow-believers on the basis of this communion with God and also with the Prophets and Saints of the world. The Nava Samhita was meant to be a guide to the followers of the New Dispensation in the matter of personal, domestic and social duties. The book was called by him the "Sacred Laws of the Aryans of the New Dispensation". It was meant to be followed in spirit, and he expressly warned his followers against making a fetish or an infallible Scripture of it. In the Preface to the book he says :

Let not, however, the Samhita be a new fetish. It is no infallible gospel: it is not our holy scripture. It is only the national Law of the Aryans of the New Church in India, in which is embodied the spirit of the New Faith in its application to social life. It contains the essence of God's moral law adapted to the peculiar needs and character of reformed Hindus, and based upon their national instincts and traditions. It is essentially, not literally, Heaven's holy injunction unto us of the New Church in India. We shall not therefore bow to its letter, but accept its spirit and its essence for our guidance.

One of the very important things in this book is the Creed of the New Dispensation. Though it is abstract, it is remarkable for its great catholicity and its positive character. It is in its affirmations that it differs largely from the preceding creeds of the Brahma Samaj which were more negative than positive. As

given in the form of questions from the minister and answers from the would-be-initiate, it stands thus :

Minister : Dost thou believe in the Church Universal, which is the repository of all ancient wisdom and the receptacle of modern science, which recognizes in all prophets and saints a harmony, in all scriptures a unity and through all dispensations a continuity, which abjures all that separates and divides, and always magnifies unity and peace, which harmonizes reason and faith, *Yoga* and *Bhakti*, asceticism and social duty in their highest forms and which shall make of all nations and sects one kingdom and one family in the fulness of time ?

Candidate : Yes.

Minister : Dost thou believe in natural inspiration, general and special ? Dost thou believe in Providence, general and special ?

Candidate : Yes.

Minister : Dost thou accept and revere the Scriptures ?

Candidate : Yes : so far as they are records of the wisdom and devotion and piety of inspired geniuses and of the dealings of God's special Providence in the salvation of nations, of which record only the spirit is God's but the letter is man's.

Minister : Dost thou accept and revere the world's prophets and saints ?

Candidate : Yes, so far as they embody and reflect the different elements of Divine character, and set forth the highest ideals of life for the instruction and sanctification of the world, I ought to revere and love and follow all that is divine in them, and try to assimilate it to my soul, making what is theirs and God's mine.

Minister : What is thy creed ?

Candidate : The Science of God, which enlightens all.

Minister : What is thy Gospel ?

**Candidate :** The Love of God which saveth all.

**Minister :** What is thy Heaven ?

**Candidate :** Life in God, which is accessible to all.

**Minister :** What is thy Church ?

**Candidate :** The invisible Kingdom of God in which is all truth, all love, all holiness.

The last semi-public act of Keshub was the building and consecration of his domestic sanctuary called the *Nava Devalaya*. Ever since he had begun to hold daily service with his fellow-believers he had felt the need of a proper place for the same. In the big family house where he lived along with the other members of the Sen family, the inconvenience in regard to this matter was very great. While the Bharat Ashram lasted, there was no difficulty. Later on in 1877 when Keshub bought a large mansion on the Upper Circular Road, subsequently named the *Lily Cottage*, he reserved one of the biggest rooms in it for this purpose. But Keshub was not satisfied with this arrangement. Now that some of the missionaries had built houses on pieces of land given to them by Keshub from his own plot of ground close to his house\* he thought of building a chapel to which they might have free access at all times of the day. The construction of this place was hurried on during the last months of the year, and its consecration took place on the 1st January, 1884. Keshub was carried as it were from his death-bed to perform the ceremony. The very touching prayer that he offered there was the first and the last he uttered.

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\* This neighbourhood was called Mangal Para, the Blessed Neighbourhood.



in that sanctuary. He was decidedly the worse for the effort. Only a week after, on the 8th January 1884, this great and good man passed away amidst the universal sorrow of not only his beloved city, but of the whole of Hindustan. With his death came to an end not only the first and the most important period of the Church of the New Dispensation, but of the best part of the history of the Brahma Samaj as well. He was instrumental chiefly in making the Brahma Samaj what it had become, and with him the power and influence associated with the name of the Samaj practically vanished.

## Chapter IX

## BRAHMARSHI KESHUB CHUNDER SEN

It is not easy to deal with Keshub's life apart from his work in connection with the Brahma Samaj and the New Dispensation. Ever since his early youth to the last day of his life he lived for these, and he had no life apart from them. Devendranath had said about him years ago : " Whatever he thought in his mind he had the power to express in speech. Whatever he said he had the power to do. Whatever he did he had the power of making other men do." These words were literally true of him. However, some account of his inner life may be given here. \*

Keshub was born of a well-known family of the Vaidya † caste in 1838. His grandfather Dewan Ram Kamal Sen was a self-made man who had risen very high in the East India Company's service. Some idea of his ability, industry and integrity may be formed from the fact that he rose from the petty post of a type-setter drawing eight rupees a month to the Dewanship of the Bank of Bengal drawing 2000 Rs. a month. He was a contemporary of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and was one of the few big men of Calcutta in those days. The religion of the Sen family was Vaishnavism, and Ram Kamal Sen seems to have been a devout follower of it. He was also a man of literary tastes and compiled a voluminous dictionary in English and Bengali.

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\* This has been done at great length by the present writer in his book " Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen. "

† A non-Brahmin caste.

Besides this, he seems to have been engaged in several other public activities, though it is doubtful if he fully sympathised with Ram Mohan. He died when Keshub was about five years old and he is said to have prognosticated the future greatness of his grandson. Keshub's father died soon after. The chief influence that moulded Keshub in his early years seems to have come from his mother who was the very soul of goodness. Keshub was extremely fond of his mother all his life, and it is not unlikely that the idea of the Motherhood of God may have been deepened in him by the example of his mother. Keshub's religious life seems to have begun under the influence of her example as he gave up eating fish at the early age of fourteen.\*

After going through the school course Keshub joined College, but he does not seem to have been happy with all his studies there. He was too much occupied with his literary studies to devote much time to other things, especially mathematics. Owing to this he could not take a degree. Some three or four years that he passed in college he devoted to a serious study of Mental and Moral Philosophy, which provided him with a basis for his Theism. Sir William Hamilton, Victor Cousin, M' Cosh, Theodore Parker, Carlyle and Emerson were his favourite authors at this time. Shakespeare, however, was his chief favourite all his life. What little reading Keshub did, he seems to have done during these years. He was never a scholar in the

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\* Widows do not eat fish in Bengal. This abstinence is considered a part of the ascetic life which they are required to follow.

proper sense of the term, nor a thinker. In this he was different from men like Ram Mohan or Dayanand Sarasvati, the founder of the Arya Samaj.

But he had another training, and that was from God Himself. He says :

\* The first lesson from the scriptures of my life is Prayer. When no one helped me, when I did not enter the membership of any religious society, did not examine the merits of religious systems, or adopt any one as my own : when I did not resort to the company of any believers or devotees : in that dawn of my spiritual life the voice that sounded in my heart was "Pray ! Pray !" I did not know definitely why or for what I shall pray, but that was not the time to reason. It never occurred to me that I might be mistaken. I did pray. ....I offered one prayer in the morning and one in the evening, both of which I had written out. The day-dawn brightened into morning, the sun rose higher and higher. All that was hidden in darkness before began to clear up. Objects around were distinctly seen, and by the practice of prayer I gained an endless resistless strength, the strength of a lion.

This habit of prayer remained with Keshub to the very end of his life, and it is no exaggeration to say that his entire spiritual life was based on that foundation. He was pre-eminently the man of prayer in the Brahma Samaj, and there have been few like him in this matter in New Hindustan. He was at his best while praying, and his prayers in Bengali are published in several volumes. They are remarkable for their transparent sincerity, earnestness and depth of devotional feeling. His English prayers reveal the same

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\* *Jeevan-Veda* (Scriptures of Life). A series of autobiographical lectures which were given as sermons. The quotations given here are from the English translation of Moozomdar given in his Life of Keshub.

qualities, though in a smaller measure \*. Shastri compared his deep faith in prayer to that of George Muller. There is this difference, however, that Keshub made it a point never to pray for material things, whether for himself or for others. His prayers were entirely for spiritual things. In regard to the fruit of prayer he says:

\* I knew that whoever prayed heard something. From the beginning the doctrine of *adesh* (inspiration) was involved in this. What religion should I adopt? Prayer answered this question. Should I leave all secular work and become a missionary? What relations should I keep with my wife? How far should I mix myself with money matters? Prayer answered all these questions. I did not then think much on the doctrine of inspiration, but I had the conviction that he who prays gets a response, he who wants to see beholds, and he that has a desire to hear, is given to hear.. ...Gradually I joined the Brahma Samaj, became a devotee, a missionary, a preceptor. Everything came in time.

Thus from the beginning all the great work of Keshub, that is, the best part of the Brahma Samaj, revolved round the axis of his prayer-life, the two poles of which were prayer and inspiration. Together with this he had an acute sense of sin which was as much a cause as consequence of his ever-deepening prayer-life. On this he says :

† What is sin? What does a man do to be sinful? I did not discuss these questions, and then come to the sense of sin. In looking about I felt in an instant what sin was. Naturally I had the sense of sin. In the state I am speaking of

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\* They are published in a volume. (Mission House, Ramanath Moomzomdar Street, Harrison Road, Calcutta.) All the works of Keshub can be had in this place.

† *Jeevan-Veda.*

no man as teacher created in me the sense of sin. I was the strongest witness of my own sin. "I am a sinner, I am a sinner" my heart always said this. In the forenoon, in the afternoon, all the hours of the day, as long as I was awake, I had continually this sense of sin. In the dictionary of the world, theft, robbery and such other things are called sin. In my dictionary sin means self-reproach, sin means disease, an unhealthy condition, a weakness, sin means the possibility of becoming sinful. I did not rest satisfied to know sin as sin: the possibility of committing sin was dreadful to me. When the light of conscience dawned on my heart, I beheld there hundreds and thousands of objects great and small, such as inertness, weakness and passions of many kinds.

This keen sense of sin was not without a remedy:

\* But glory be unto God that from another point of view there are few men as happy as I myself. These worms of hell in my eye, ear and tongue, what do they do? Much good. If I had no sense of sin, I should not come here. For if my hell is a present reality, my heaven is also a present reality. In the body that is long diseased, it is not easy to detect the seat of ill-health, but in a sound body every sign of disease is easily found. Because the instant I find a sin that instant also I feel the intense desire of prayer and *Yoga*. If I had been guilty of only ten sins, or ten sinful possibilities, when I got rid of those I should look upon myself as the greatest saint. But, now conscience, by continually producing in me the sense of sin opens to me the path of endless progress.

To these was added another characteristic which he called *Vairagya* (Asceticism).

† When I entered the world, it was as if I entered the graveyard. God had appointed that the garden of pleasure

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\* *Jeevan-Veda.*

† *Jeevan-Veda.*

should be to me like the abode of death. The skilful heavenly Artist who drew the portrait of my life first painted around it a background of deep intense black. In the midst of this black he brought out a relief of brilliant colouring. So it has ever been. The black and the bright side by side enhance the beauty of the picture. In sorrow, anxiety, asceticism my religious life began. In my eighteenth year religion first dawned, but when I was fourteen I left eating meat. Who taught me that meat was forbidden? One guide I knew, him I honoured, and I called him conscience. That Conscience spoke to the boy, and the boy made his renunciation. Asceticism began in my fourteenth year. And as I grew in religion, I began to pray, gained in moral enthusiasm, and received God's grace, the cloud which was no bigger than a finger on my life's sky grew exceedingly dark, so dark, that it overcast my face, saddened my heart, and at last I had neither peace by day nor by night. All the pleasure which youth enjoys I shunned as poison... Thus the foundation of my life was laid in asceticism. What is necessary for an ascetic life I have got. The gods and the titans have fought in me, the gods have gained the victory. Conscience and Asceticism, like two brothers, have governed my life and the world has never been able to come near me. And at last that which was the cause of fear before, has become friendly. The graveyard, in which I first built my house, has now flowered and fructified as a beautiful garden, through the midst of which is the road to God. No one can make out where the graveyard lay. The beginning was in sorrow, the end is in joy.

He deduces from this a most important spiritual law:

\* Unless thou turnest thyself into a corpse, divine life shall not enter into thee—this was the law God applied to my case.

I sowed my seed in tears, I reap my harvest in laughter. This can not be the law for every one. Each one must follow the law applicable to his own case. But there is one lesson in my life which may apply to all men. Every great truth, great deed, great deliverance is accompanied by throes of child-birth. You shall have to die once, if you should want to live ever afterwards. If you want to be regenerated or twice-born, once for all you must retire into the wilderness. That asceticism which brings joy I hail...When asceticism presents itself in life, I also look for a similar scientific fact. When a new dispensation is about to come, a new spiritual reality is at hand, or a new discipline is to be revealed, then asceticism appears and possesses the mind. Forsake that asceticism which makes a display of itself before men. Conceal asceticism within thy heart, and in external things be like other men. If there is any hypocrisy in this, born ascetics like me encourage it.

We shall have to mention one or two more characteristics with which he was endowed at the start of his religious career. Next comes enthusiasm which he calls Baptism of Fire.

\* If I ask thee, O Self, in what creed wast thou baptised in early life? My soul answereth, it was the baptism of fire. I am a worshipper of the religion of fire. I am partial to the doctrine of enthusiasm. To me the state of being on fire is the state of salvation...In the life of this person who now speaks, from the beginning the fire of enthusiasm and energy has burnt. It does not show itself as a temporary heroism, it does not come and go. In the dictionary of religion it is defined that heat means life; the reverse of heat means death.....Hell and coldness have been always identical to me. Around my heart, and around my society I have always kept burning the fire of enthusiasm. When I have served one body of men, I have longed for other bodies of men whom I may serve. When



I have compiled truths from one set of scriptures, lest those truths might grow old, I have eagerly sought to gather other truths from other scriptures also. This keeps up the condition of heat. I have always run after what is new, always wished for new acquirements, new joys, new ideas. What is new is warm, what is old is always cold.

His experience of the *Voice of God* is deeply mystical.

\* If there be a voice speaking from inside the heart, men usually call it a ghost. He that is possessed by a ghost hears voices within and outside himself. From the dawn of religious life I have heard such voices both inside and outside. Yet I have never taken them to be ghosts. This is another peculiarity of my life. In many instances I have found there is a person within the person, there is a tongue within the tongue, and they talk in different voices, and the voices can be distinguished by the ear. Men talk, reflect, judge, and then learn religious truths. I have often confessed I came not to the path of religion by this process. But within the "I" there is a "Thou" separate from thyself. That called out to me: that I perceive: and by his word I want to practise religion...I can never disbelieve this voice. Whenever I heard this speech of the invisible living Person, I instantly made out it was not the speaking of friends or relations, nor my own voice, nor a truth learnt in some book, nor a memory of the past, nor a picture painted by imagination.....When my own mind has apprehended poverty, ill-health, insult, calumny, within my heart I have heard "Fear not!" Putting my faith in these inward whispers I said "Whether I live or die, Lord, to thy feet I will cling." Thus have I repeatedly forsaken friends and relatives, and encountered serious troubles. This voice I heard in the day, I heard in the night. It grows every day more and more solemn within me.

There was the spirit of discipleship also :

\* The world is the seminary of God. So long as we are to be here, we shall have to acquire piety and the knowledge of God. Therefore I have never looked upon myself as a teacher, and never shall. I come as a learner, I am still learning, and for ever shall remain a disciple. The leading idea of the Sikh religion, that of discipleship is flowing in my blood, and gives vigour to my life. The mornings and evenings teach me, I read from the scriptures of prosperity and adversity. Every object is my teacher, every animal is my teacher, and I have learnt a great deal from human nature.

As in the case of the Maharshi, Keshub's own reading had convinced him of the truth of Theism, and this led him spontaneously to join the Brahma Samaj. There, with all these qualities more or less developed in him, he soon became a power as we have already seen. He was a born leader also, and even before he joined the Samaj there were a number of ardent spirits looking up to him as a friend, philosopher and guide. The chief of these was Pratap Chunder Moozomdar who was also a close relation of his. The latter quotes a saying of the Maharshi in regard to Keshub which shows how Devendranath had been impressed by Keshub even at this early stage:

† When Rajah Duswant (husband of the discarded Sakuntala) had occasion to go up to heaven, he saw, outside the great portals, a little boy playing with a young lion whose teeth he insisted upon forcing open, that he might count them. The Rajah thought if such be the power of that little fellow when he is a child, what will he become when he grows up to

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° *Jeevan-Veda.*

† The Life of Keshub.

be a man? Raja Dushwant did not recognise that the brave child was his own son, born of the banished Sakuntala. "Brahmanand" said Devendranath, "is but a youth. If such be his power now, what will it be when he fully grows up?" Alas, that when Keshub did grow up to the full height of his manhood, Devendranath could not be at hand to give him the fond fatherly recognition. Then they had separated, never to unite in this world again!

Henceforth Keshub's life was identical with that of the Brahma Samaj as it developed under him. The growth of the Samaj has been traced already. The source of all that development lay in the personal life of Keshub. When he joined the Samaj, it was a sort of wilderness from which Devendranath, who perhaps was the only true Brahma, had to flee away seeking shelter on the Himalayas. When Keshub passed away about a quarter of a century after, he left it as a flourishing community, a rising Church and a powerful movement. Above all there were a large number of men and women who had learnt from him the great art of living a life of dedication to God and Humanity. Besides Keshub set in motion forces which have only just begun to work. He was far in advance of his time. Thus even though the Brahma Samaj may die entirely—which may God avert!—Keshub's work will not be over. He worked for something much larger. Soon after his death, the *Indian Daily News*, an English paper of Calcutta, rightly said about him:

Keshub Chunder Sen's work is not likely to be fully appreciated in this century; but when men shall look back after a generation or two for the causes of great movements in thought and religious movements affecting probably the Indian Christianity

of that day in a degree only less than they affect its Hinduism, it will probably be that no figure will occupy so large a place as that of the man who has just gone to his rest.

These words were prophetic and they are being literally fulfilled to-day. But there is more than this. Keshub has a message not only for his country, but for the whole world. The late Dr. Cheyne in his *Reconciliation of Races and Religions* said:

The greatest religious teachers and reformers who have appeared in recent times are (if I am not much mistaken) Baha'ullah the Persian and Keshub Chunder Sen the Indian.

Keshub has been able to be all this because of his Christ-ideal. The qualities mentioned above had found their centre in Christ from his early youth, and Keshub was drawn towards Him Crucified more and more all his life. The saints and prophets of the world for whom he had such deep reverence were all centred in Christ. Pratap says:

\* His cherished aim was to live to harmonise the characters of the greatest prophets in his own character. He had found in his ideal of Christ such a harmony. He had found in his Christ-ideal a combination of the embodiments of the deepest humanity, such as Socrates, Sakya Muni, Chaitanya and other true sons of God.

This Christ-ideal is the centre of religions as well; especially of Hinduism and Christianity, the two most typical religions of the world. While referring to the all absorbent character of Hinduism Keshub says:

† While lower Hinduism will thus make all prophets into gods and goddesses, its higher and purer spirit will pass through the New Dispensation into the life of Christ, making true Hinduism and true Christianity one thing in God.

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° The Life of Keshub.

† The New Dispensation Journal.

Keshub's chief service not only to Hindustan but to the world lies in the fact that he in his life and experience affiliated the mystic consciousness of the Hindu race to the Christ-ideal. This is a wonderful piece of work and his ministry has just begun. Thus he is the father of the Hindu Church of Christ, the only Church of Christ in Hindustan—not a national so much as a cultural Church—which is slowly but none the less surely rising in the land. The Oriental Catholic Church, which also is gradually taking shape in the midst of many sectarian Christian Churches in the whole of the Orient, may well claim him as one of its fathers. Both these Churches as living branches of the Church Catholic and Universal have a world-wide ministry before them, and Keshub's name and work will be cherished in grateful remembrance by an ever increasing number of Hindu and Oriental disciples of Christ.

So great a thing was not born at once. It required all the adaptations and adjustments which Keshub had continually to make in the Brahma Samaj, and still more the travail of the New Dispensation. It had an extraordinary *Sadhana* behind, a *Sadhana* inspired and sustained by divine grace. The early stages of his religious life were passed in a sort of wilderness of asceticism and moral rigour. But this was not always so. The trials and troubles he underwent in connection with his separation from the Maharshi opened as it were the fountains of life. In regard to how this *Bhakti* came he says :

\* O reader, the scriptures of my life are the scriptures of hope, because I did not bring with me into the world everything

I possess. When you hear the account of the truths I have acquired by spiritual effort and experience, your hearts cannot fail to be inspired with hope. In this life there has been a side of weakness and darkness of which when you know, those amongst you who are despairing shall gain courage thereby. There was no love of God in this life of mine at first, nay, there was little love or passion of any kind. I had faith, I had conscience, I had asceticism, and with these I descended into the scene of action. These gifts are most valuable, they are excellent, to men in certain condition they are most rare, but all these three are dry. Into a life that began with such a drought, how did the waters of Bhakti enter.....Though some friends gave me the title of *Brahmananda* (Rejoicer in God) my heart did not respond to it, I did not think I was worthy of this title. In the midst of my austere ideas I continually said to myself "renounce this, renounce that, mortify thy senses, put forth thy energy, preach unidolatrous monotheism." But the nectar of peace, the nectar of the love of God I had not tasted.....Within and without there was harsh obedience to conscience and to faith. The sands of the desert seemed to fly on every side. How long could I go on like this? I felt it was not right. And as soon as the least sentiment of Bhakti showed itself in my heart, some one from within brought me before the altar of the God of love. There was a change: I perceived what I had not before I was beginning to have. And now so great is my love, that I cannot say whether in me conscience is stronger or Bhakti, whether I have greater joy or asceticism. I feel now that love has become my nature.

Thus from 1866 Keshub concentrated all his efforts in making his movement one of Bhakti. From this time to 1875, Keshub along with his disciples and friends gave daily the morning hours to devotions. And from 1875 to the very end he gave the best part of the

day, that is, from nine in the morning to one in the afternoon and even later to the same purpose. There were other occasions besides this such as anniversary festivals when whole days were given to prayer and devotions. In addition to all this, there were periods when Keshub retired with his disciples to quiet places and scenes of natural beauty for the purpose of communion with God. Thus all the ideas and activities of Keshub were set on the background of this devotional life of his, and so they were suffused with its atmosphere. This was the source from which he found all his inspiration and strength for his movement. Keshub, however, took care to see that this did not degenerate into emotionalism or sentimentalism. He was always saved from falling into any extreme by the remarkable powers of equilibrium that he possessed. This was due ultimately to the Christ-ideal that he had at the back of his mind and spirit. He was saved from the excess of Bhakti by what he called Yoga. He says :

\* As Bhakti, the love of God, has been with me an acquired virtue, so also Yoga, union with the spirit of God. In the early days of my religious life I did not know what Yoga was, never heard its name, and never thought I should have to cultivate it. The subject of Yoga had not then arisen in the Brahma Samaj, and the duty of practising it could not be traced in any book written at that time. Years passed away in the pursuit of truth, in the discipline of asceticism, and by the grace of God at last Bhakti presented itself in my heart. This Bhakti was in course of time turned into inebriation in God's love. As the love of God grew in me, I felt however that to make it permanent, it was necessary to have Yoga.

The intense excitement of devotional feeling may last for a little while, but to secure the permanence of such feeling it was necessary to have contemplative union with the Divine spirit. If you have faith in God, you must be one with Him. The heart should be the lover of God, the eye should behold the spirit of God in everything. Bhakti and Yoga thus both presented themselves in my view and I felt the desire of cultivating them.....But Yoga did not grow so easily.....I was not led to it by the precept of any man.....As the grace of God descended to me in the shape of Bhakti, so some wind that blew from some other direction brought to me Yoga. When I got both I could distinguish the one as Bhakti, and the other as Yoga. The one sweetened my spiritual union with God, the other turned my devotions into reverence and awe.....The one served to establish my love of God on the ground of faith, the other served to shed the waters of sweetness on my spiritual union. Otherwise perhaps Yoga would have led me to pantheism, and Bhakti begotten superstition. But now I planted the garden of God's love on the mountains of spiritual union. That garden is not made of dreams and imaginations, because it is built on the hard rock. The two unions made a grand union, and it produced its natural effects.....In woods, in waters, in fruits, in flowers, in wind, in fire I saw the great Substance God. And He whom as substance I behold in everything, I realise as the exceedingly Beautiful One. He whose beginning is in Reality, has His end in Beauty. The union of these two has saved me from much sin and error...What is Yoga? Such intimate union with the indwelling spirit of God that the instant any object is perceived, God is perceived in it. The sky is no longer the mere sky, but the expanse of Intelligence spreads through it, shining in its brilliant unity everywhere, one force presenting its hard solid front in all things. Like a blazing fire I behold God on all sides, like a blowing storm I felt Him pressing upon my



flesh and blood. I felt the Spirit to be near, I went still nearer, I touched the Spirit, I became one with Spirit, thus my Yoga became deeper. There are degrees in such union, it may be for an instant, for an hour, or as often as I want.....At first I saw Him as a flash of lightning then as always glimmering in the heart. Now whenever I desire I can behold Him. As you strike the flint and the spark flies out, so any instant the spark of God's presence may be struck out of my body, my tongue, my hands, fingers all give out the same sparks.....Now as soon as I call upon God, He reveals Himself. Now I may doubt whether I exist or not, but my faith in God can not be doubted. The spirit of God and my own self are now woven together. The two objects have united into one, and the one cannot be denied without denying the other. Such is the gospel of hope I have to preach.

Keshub had, thus, gone through not only a very great *Sadhana*, but had got much *Siddhi* (spiritual attainment) also. This revealed itself on his face even. Pratap says:

\* His face assumed a strange beauty when he was in the rapture of devotional excitement; an unconscious smile played upon his noble handsome features; tall and athletic as he was, his whole attitude was erect and full of light; many among the congregation gazed upon his face with wonder. Strange to relate, after the fierce agonies of his last moments were over, as soon as all was hushed in death, the same wonted well-known smile returned, and lighted up and glorified his countenance! The thousands that came to pay their last honours to him marvelled. They kept his sweet face uncovered till the funeral pyre was set fire to.

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\* The Life of Keshub.

It is rather interesting to see laymen among Europeans being the readier to give their testimony to Keshub's spiritual greatness. One such has come quite recently from Lord Ronaldsby, an ex—Governor of Bengal. In words well-weighed he says:

\* He was, indeed, pre-eminently a man who lived by faith, a man whose whole life was dominated by an intuitive knowledge that he had a mission to perform, and who exercised over his fellow-men the influence which outstanding personality inspired by a steadfast singleness of purpose and a contagious enthusiasm, can always command... ..His intellect was not of that type which loves to build up elaborate systems of philosophy based upon pure reason. His intellectual life was passed in a warm atmosphere of emotion rather than in the chill regions of undiluted logic. He must certainly be judged to have been lacking in powers of organization : and there is some excuse for assuming at first sight that his actions were not infrequently dictated by caprice. *Reflection upon the more marked characteristics of his temperament, however, and upon the extent to which his whole life was guided by prayer and the response received by him to his prayers suggests that what might at first be mistaken for impulse was in reality in his case inspiration.*†

He adds:

For he, more than any man perhaps, showed by precept and by example that the gulf between Europe and Asia might be bridged without the sacrifice of anything that was fundamental in the race-genius or the race-culture of either. While he was capable of assimilating much that seemed to him to be good in the ideals and practice of the West, he remained always

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\* The Heart of Aryavarta.

† The italics are ours.

a true Indian. He was too great a character to be a mere mimic of others, and he was too great a soul to cherish that false pride of race which blinds a man to the virtues of all peoples other than his own. He showed how East and West might be complementary rather than antagonistic to one another, and his life was an incitement to those who might not be willing to go so far as he did in casting aside the restraints and trammels of an ancient and venerable social tradition, at least to follow him in the spirit if not in the actual letter of his teaching.

Whereas the missionaries of his own time and of later days should have been the first to hail him as a prophet of God, one is pained to see that they were his "most formidable \* " antagonists out of the Brahma Samaj. Many of these and several of the Brahmas who had separated from him did their worst to prejudice the mind of the public not only in this country but in the Western world too. Perhaps no other man in our times has been subjected to such a regular campaign of misunderstanding, calumny and vilification. The mists raised by lies have been so thick that they have taken half a century to rise...Amongst the Brahmas perhaps his worst critic was Pundit Shivnath Shastri who did all he could to paint Keshub as black as possible for a long time at first, and then to damn him with faint praise. Amongst Christian missionaries Dr. Farquhar has done more than any one else to injure the fair name of Keshub, and thereby he has done lasting harm not only to Keshub but to the Kingdom of Christ in this land. His account of Keshub in his book "Modern

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\* The Life of Keshub.

Religious Movements in India" contains one of the grossest pieces of misrepresentation\* to be found in all literature, whether religious or secular. The chief reason for this great campaign was that Keshub was through and through a man of faith, a man of God, a prophet, and such a one, as he himself had said in his *True Faith* must go through a sort of crucifixion. As an integral part of this general cause the following words of Pratap have much significance :

† Hindu and Christian influences thus began to flow side by side in his life and movements, balancing and correcting the tendencies which they were respectively calculated to foster. The growth of the Christian spirit in the New Dispensation thus became national, and the growth of national Theism was regulated by the spirit and teachings of Christ. This harmonious evolution became an eye-sore to certain Christians and Brahmas. The former could not bear that Christ and his religion should be interpreted nationally, and connected with the traditional forms and instincts of Hindu faith ; and the latter were sorely offended that Christ and his teachings should be so much talked about and imported into the colourless creed of the Brahma Samaj. They had expected that the uproar raised after the Cuch Behar marriage would completely overwhelm Keshub Chunder Sen. And when they found that far from that Keshub continued to produce fresh sensations by unforeseen developments and formidable revivals, their disappointment was great, and disappointment produced rage and hatred.

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\* See Preface to "Brahmarshi Keshub Chunder Sen" by the present writer.

† The Life of Keshub.

Keshub's greatness, as was inevitable, was based upon true poverty of spirit. This man who had an international fame in his own life-time, who used to be visited by Viceroys and Rajas and Maharajas at his private residence, whose lectures were attended by the highest in the land including the Viceroy and moreover who came to be so closely related to a Prince, was at his happiest in the company of the poor.

\* If men are divided into two classes, the rich and the poor, among which of these should I be included? O my soul, what is thy caste? Art thou the child of the rich man, or the poor man? I want to know my own nature. Like which of these two castes are my tastes and desires, the company of what sort of men I like, and whose ways do I love to follow? After a minute self-examination of the last twenty-five years, I have concluded that I belong to the caste of the poor. In my daily habits and actions very large symptoms of poverty are seen. ...I have observed the traits of my nature very deeply, and I can, with truth for my witness, declare I am among the poor-spirited. Though born high, though beset with various signs of wealth, yet the feelings of my mind do not correspond to them.....If I see two companies of men, one rich, the other poor, my nature likes to consort with the poor, and finds pleasure in them.....Where the poor are there is rest for me; there is life for me. I never learnt this poverty by effort, it came to me naturally.

In another chapter of the same Jeevan-Veda we find the following :

Three kinds of men I can not easily approach, the rich, the famous and the learned. Duty says go, therefore I go. Duty further commands me to speak in public, therefore I speak. When

I do not hear that commandment, and begin to reflect, my hands and feet lose their firmness, and my eyes close of themselves. If I try to speak I fear I will make mistakes in grammar. The thought comes into my mind "O when will this meeting end, when shall I go back to my old familiar company, to my humble friends?".....I see men coming to visit me. I feel inclined to run away. I cannot say "how do you do?" I can not look them in the face. If they do not speak first, my alarm becomes all the greater. If great men of the world happen to come, I think whether I cannot make a timely retreat, I fail even to welcome my own brethren. I am judged therefore to be a vain man, conceited on account of my religiousness: many hard things are said of me. My own judgment says I am wrong. But I cannot wash this nature of mine out of its weaknesses. I have at last concluded that in the religious world I am to be always on the bosom of God, and in the world under the protection of some guardian or friend.

We shall finish this sketch with two more passages from the pen of Pratap:

\* Thus Keshub's life was like an unfathomable music. Its many-voiced sweetness, its stupendous reality, its harmony of a hundred ideals, its evergrowing height and depth, had the gift of infinity in them. A negative infinite always moved his scorn. He held, worshipped, and taught the Infinite positive. The soul of prophecy and poetry both was in him. He could not only behold, but he could utter, and though his utterance was inadequate to express his vision, yet it went forth as a song, as a glory, as an unnamable influence, deep into every soul, deep calling unto deep. His life had the heavenly magic of making the true beautiful, and the beautiful true. Both the truth and the beauty lay in his goodness. He was completely good, good in every relation, strong in his goodness, fearless and confident

like a child, never vain in his success, never downcast in his failures. All religions found in him their congenial elements, all scriptures their expounder, all prophets their disciple. It seemed as if he could speak the language of a hundred spheres, and partake of the sacraments of a hundred communions. Every description of devotee found in him a fellow-devotee, Hindus, Moslems and Christians alike. Every sinner, every sorrow-stricken soul found in him the curing consolation that comes from kindred experience. The joyful found in him abundant perennial joyfulness, the pure-minded came from him with a brighter flame of purity, only the wicked, evil-disposed, and unbelieving found him fearful like a sword. Women who flocked into his company found him exceedingly womanly, and to children of whom he was very fond he was ever child-like. The harmony of a higher world was in him. His complicated, many-sided perfection made it difficult to comprehend him. He was sound and whole to the very core, and he "made the earth wholesome" to those who were around him.

This other passage stands at the head of the Preface to his excellent biography of his master and friend :

It is impossible for me to realize that Keshub Chunder Sen has ceased to live. Impenetrable to this aching eye of flesh, the veil behind which his glorious face is hidden is a semi-transparent veil, penetrable to the faithful spirit that longs to be united with him night and day. So vivid and intense is the image of his presence somewhere very near, in the bosom of that Infinite Father, communion with whom is my daily rest, that every unsatisfied aspiration, shared with him, makes its appeal to Keshub, every sorrow such as he suffered seeks his silent sympathy, every trial such as he bore waits for strength and endurance upon his glowing example. His influences suffuse this luminous atmosphere of thought, goodness, worship, wisdom. The abounding spirituality of the

Church of modern Theism is fragrant with the incense of his pure profound life. I have sometimes seen thousands of our Indian roses, beaded by the morning dew, light up long-stretching fields in the gloom before day-break. But scarcely did the first sun-gleam glance on the fairy scene, when lo ! every rose had disappeared, gathered and hidden away in the folds of the reapers' robes. Yet though the flowers had changed places, their sweet aroma scented sky and land, till the next morning's roses appeared again, adding beauty to beauty, and sweetness to sweetness. Keshub's life-scenes presented such a garden of real romance. Every morning they were blooming, fragrant, fresh: his words: his works: his prayers; all alike. Who that knew him, loved him, was with him to the end can deny the truth of this? Hidden away by the hand of the Great Reaper in the folds of the Eternal, Keshub's influences permeate everything good and pure both in as well as out of the Brahma Samaj. As his life-long friend and follower, it has been my attempt to gather these influences with a reverent hand in the following pages.



## CHAPTER X

## THE ADI BRAHMA SAMAJ

The Calcutta Brahma Samaj practically lost all its life when Keshub separated from it in the year 1866. About a decade before that Devendranath had retired from the Samaj and also from the world, and it was only the voice of God which he heard on the Himalayas that brought him back to the Brahma Samaj. He then worked along with Keshub with an enthusiasm that was remarkable, and undoubtedly it was he who, with his great sympathy and support, was largely instrumental in putting Keshub and his fellow-workers on the way where they achieved so much. But the troubles that arose in connection with the schism were too much for him, and he eventually retired for good from the Samaj.

Before doing this, however, he put the affairs of his branch of the Samaj in proper order. One of the things that he did first was to purify it of all the innovations and reforms that had entered into it since Keshub's connection with it. This was a retrograde step and he took it deliberately. He wanted his Samaj to retain its *Varnashrama* order and thereby clearly distinguish it from the new Samaj that was rising. To this end he even changed its name from the Calcutta Brahma Samaj to the *Adi\* Brahma Samaj*. He wanted it to work along the lines laid down by Ram Mohan, especially in regard to the ministry and Caste. In Ram Mohan's time and later the ministers of the Samaj were

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\* Original Brahma Samaj.

none but Brahmins. To this rule exception was made only in the case of Keshub, and probably one or two of his companions. In a way this was more than an exception because Keshub was made the Minister of the Samaj, and for a time the keeping of the sacred thread was considered a disqualification for serving as a minister. Even Devendranath had discarded his thread. A change was made in this, and the Samaj lapsed back into its former position which allowed only Brahmins to officiate as ministers. Intermarriages, also, were disallowed. Evidently Devendranath's aim was to make his part of the movement one of purely religious revival and reform.

The management of the Adi Samaj was left into the hands of a Committee with Raj Narain Bose, a man of approved ability and force of character, as its President. Under him the Samaj may have shown some activity for a time, particularly as it had before it the example of the Bharatvarshiya Brahma Samaj, but it is doubtful if it ever did much. The Adi Samaj, however, did make its presence felt now and then, especially in the person of its illustrious leader the Maharshi, and in the controversy that arose in connection with the Marriage Act of 1872. But its general tenor of life has been one of comparative quietude. Raj Narain Bose had to leave Calcutta soon after owing to ill-health, and thus the Samaj was deprived of his active help.

There has been almost a total lack of missionary enthusiasm in this body, so that there have been but few members added to its ranks during the course of half a

century. This Samaj has been chiefly the concern of the Tagore family. Undoubtedly it can count illustrious men as its leaders and members such as the Tagore brothers, namely, the late Satyendranath Tagore, the late Dwijendranath Tagore, Dr. Ravindranath Tagore the great poet and others, but their influence has hardly done any thing towards vitalizing the Samaj.

The chief activity of this Samaj, if at all it could be considered as an affair of the Samaj, has been in the field of literature. Devendranath's own works, namely, his sermons and auto-biography, are the classics of Brahma literature and they have been already mentioned. To these he added in course of time two or three smaller works in the vernacular, called "Progress in Knowledge and Religion" "Immortality and Salvation" and "A Gift". The inspiration of the Maharshi's life and example has continued to work in his family, which, undoubtedly, is the most gifted one in the country. Of all the Tagore brothers Dwijendranath Tagore was perhaps most like his father. He was a writer of note, and his writings, especially in the line of religious philosophy, are considered valuable. Ravindranath's *Gitanjali*, his numerous prayers and sermons in Bengali and other writings also breathe forth the same inspiration, and their influence has gone far beyond the bounds of Hindustan.

In connection with the Adi Samaj one more activity may be mentioned, *viz.*, the work centring round *Shanti Niketan*. Even after his retirement Devendranath had been freely using his money for all sorts of philanthropic purposes, but chiefly for the spread of the

Brahma Dharma. One of the last acts of his was to hand over to a body of trustees his Shanti Niketan, the place where he had spent much of his time latterly in contemplation. He wanted the place to be used for similar purposes by theistic believers, and for this he endowed it. In course of time, as is well-known, this place has under the great poet come to be one of the most important centres of intellectual and religious culture in the land. Though much of the activity thereof has been largely cultural, it is undoubted that the spirit which pervades the atmosphere there is that of the great Rishi Devendranath. There is something more to be found there. In the noble attempts of Ravindranath to make it into an international centre of culture and good-will, we find a continuation of the great work of bringing together the various religions and cultures inaugurated so well by Ram Mohan and Keshub.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE PRARTHANA SAMAJ

#### AND

### THE PROVINCIAL SAMAJES

Although much of the work of the Brahma Samaj has centred round Bengal, and its chief leaders and most of its missionaries belonged to that Province, other parts of the country have not been without some share of the inspiration that originally came there. As has been said above, it was in the sixties that Keshub went out to Bombay, Madras and other places on a preaching tour. Since then again and again preachers of the Brahma Dharma have gone to these parts, and their efforts were not in vain. In consequence Samajes sprang up in many provinces, especially in many of the cities and big towns. Of these Provincial Samajes, the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay (including in it those of Poona and Ahmedabad) has been the biggest and most important. Indeed, its influence has been so great that it is regarded as a sort of minor religious and social reform movement by itself. To regard it as such would be a mistake. Had there been no Brahma Samaj it would never have come into existence. Besides, for its origin as well as spiritual growth it has been very much indebted all along to the Brahma Samaj. It must be, therefore, considered a branch of the Brahma Samaj, and as such its history forms a part of the general history of the Samaj.

Whatever differences there are between the Brahma Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj are due to some extent

to the temperaments of the two peoples, namely, those of Bengal and of the Bombay Presidency. Whereas the former\* have been guided generally by emotion and impulse, the latter, composed of both Gujratis and Marathis, are largely governed by practical instinct. Almost all the great men of New Hindustan such as Ram Mohan, Keshub, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Ranade, Dayanand Saraswati and Gandhi, have come from these two Provinces, and the leadership of the entire country in religious, social and political spheres has been divided between them. Even a cursory glance at the names given here and such others as Tilak, Gokhale, Sir Phirozshah Mehta will show that the leaders that have come from the Bombay Presidency have been men of great force of character as well as wise in counsel. In this they have been thoroughly representative of their people. If the Bengalis could be compared to the French in their national characteristics, the people of Bombay may very well be likened to the English people. As for the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay its individuality has been due to the characteristics of the people of the Province. From the very beginning the men who started the Prarthana Samaj refused to merge themselves in the Brahma Samaj, and along with that they refused to take even the name Brahma Samaj or Brahma Dharma. This individuality of it has remained more or less intact all the time, and it has determined its character in a number of ways.

When Keshub visited Bombay in 1864 he found there a number of men who were ready for reform. The new

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\* Ram Mohan Roy was an exception to the general rule.

leaven of English education had begun to work here as elsewhere, and some of the thoughtful people among both Gujratis and Marathis were yearning after a better order of society and higher religion. As early as 1849 a kind of secret society called the Paramhansa Sabha was formed mainly by the Marathis with the object of spreading the cause of social reform. It died about a decade after, but meanwhile the number of people interested in social reform had increased. Moreover, it was during this period that the question of religious reform had been brought to the front in a way it had not been anywhere else in the country. This was done by the Maharaja Libel Case in which Karsandas Mooljee, an intrepid Bania of Gujrat, revealed a state of frightful immorality prevailing among the Vaishnavas of the Vallabhi sect, a most important religious body of Gujrat. Due to all this Keshub's visit was a most opportune one, and it gave a proper direction to the thoughts and aspirations of many of these reformers. The most important result of this visit was to make them feel the need of basing their social reform on religion, and a society was formed for the purpose of promoting the spiritual worship of one God. This was the Prarthana Samaj (Prayer Meeting). It was formally opened in the month of March 1867, and among its leaders then were such men as Vaman Abaji Modak and Atmaram Pandurang. In course of time it came to have eminent men like Mahadev Govind Ranade, Ram Krishna Bhandarkar and Narayan Chandavarkar as its leaders.

The peculiarity of this body was that it kept the middle path in religious and social reform. It avoided

the extreme of being a new religious sect such as the Brahma Samaj had come to be with its gospel of the Brahma Dharma under Devendranath, or that of a new socio-religious community like the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. In this the Prarthana Samaj was more like the Brahma Sabha of Ram Mohan Roy. There was this difference, however, that while the latter had Vedas as its basis, the Prarthana Samaj was eclectic like the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. It, moreover, kept its ministry open to members of all castes. In all this it was guided by a sound practical instinct. The same instinct also prevented it from facing facts fully and carrying things to their logical conclusions. This was as much due to the spirit of the people as to the lack of any great religious leader. Ranade and Bhandarkar were big men, but they had many interests in life, a fact which prevented them from consecrating themselves to religious aims so entirely as in the case of Devendra or Keshub. Hence the Prarthana Samaj has never been able to develop itself as a great religious force, nor has it taken a definite line of religious reform. It must be said to the credit of this Samaj, however, that in spite of a wide variety of religious belief and practice, much heterodoxy and heterogeneity, and even some intermarriages between members of different castes and even communities and races such as Hindus and Moslems, it has kept its position in the Hindu Samaj. In all this the Samaj, especially during the first thirty years of its life, furnishes us with a noble example of liberal and reformed Hinduism in its social and religious aspects.



The distinctive work of this Samaj, or rather of its leaders like Ranade and Chandavarkar, has been done in the field of social reform. The first of these was a man remarkable in many ways, and it is no exaggeration to say that he was one of the few great men of the country in the last century. His character was complimentary to that of Keshub in many respects, and they have had more to do with the shaping of New Hindustan than any other two men. Ranade lacked that intensity of religious life which was found in all the three leaders of the Brahma Samaj, but few men understood the various problems of national life so well as he did. Gifted with great powers of thought which he enriched by vast learning, he became a leader of leaders and for almost a whole generation laid down lines of thought and action in many departments of life. Of these one of the most important that engaged his attention was Social Reform, and perhaps it is to him more than to any one else that the credit belongs of making that all-important question a national one. It was as a result of his labours that the All-India Social Reform Association was started, and the Indian Social Reform Conference ever since its inception has been held along with the National Congress from 1887, *i. e.* only two years after the Congress came into existence. It is this Conference held year after year and the various Provincial Social Reform Conferences that are held off and on, that have created the public opinion in favour of Social Reform, especially in the matter of education of women, widow-remarriage, interdining and intermarriage and many other things. The Bharat-Varshiya Samaj had

taken a lead in all these things long before this, but since the Brahmas made Social Reform a question of religion almost exclusively and the Samaj had become a separate religious community, all such work done by them naturally aroused prejudice in the minds of the people. Even the Indian Reform Association that Keshub started in 1870 after his return from England on a wider basis had suffered from the same prejudice, and moreover the Brahma Samaj under Keshub was committed too far to its own line of work to be able to do anything on a basis that was not exclusively religious. Thus what the Brahma Samaj could not do, a purely secular institution was able to do and on a far larger scale.

The ideal of religious reform that this Samaj set before itself may be described in these words of Ranade himself:\*

During the last few years I have been trying to set forth from this platform, and in other places also, the past history and origin and progress of what has been well described by our saints and prophets for two thousand years and more, as the Bhagwata Dharma, of which the present Samaj movement is only a faint reflection and a humble off-shoot. One of the essential features of the Bhagwat Dharma is its Protestant character...Bhagwat Dharma may, therefore, be safely described as Protestant Hinduism and I would bespeak your favourable attention to-day to the chief features of this long continued protest, which has done such great service in the past, and which is likely to do still greater service in the future.

He then goes on to trace its descent through all that long period and more particularly through the

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\* Anniversary address at the Prarthana Mandir in 1895.

medieval times. Taking up the same train of thought he says in a book of his\* :

We have thus noticed all the principal features of the religious movement, which, commencing with Dnyandev who lived in the fifteenth century, can be traced to the end of the last century as a steady growth in spiritual virtues. It gave us a literature of considerable value in the Vernacular language of the country. It modified the strictness of the old spirit of caste exclusiveness. It raised the *Sudra* classes to a position of spiritual power and social importance almost equal to that of the Brahmans. It gave sanctity to the family relations, and raised the status of woman. It made the nation more humane, at the same time more prone to hold together by mutual toleration. It suggested and partly carried out a plan of reconciliation with the Mohammedans. It subordinated the importance of rites and ceremonies, and of pilgrimages and fasts, and of learning and contemplation, to the higher excellence of worship by means of Love and Faith. It checked the excesses of polytheism. It tended in all these ways to raise the nation generally to a higher level of capacity both of thought and action, and prepared it in a way no other nation in India was prepared to take the lead in re-establishing a united native power in the place of foreign domination. These appear to us to be the principal features of the religion of Maharashtra, which Saint Ramdas had in view when he advised Shivaji's son to follow in his father's footsteps, and propagate this Faith, at once tolerant and catholic, deeply spiritual and yet not iconoclastic.

It was the intention of the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj, particularly Ranade, to make it a part of the great movement that was thus handed down to them for ages, and that had seen some of its best fruit only

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\* The Rise of the Maratha Power.

a century or two back in the shape of the rise of the Maratha Power. It was but natural for them to think (and they were quite justified in this) that what was done in the darker days of Moslem domination was still more possible under Pax Brittanica, when light and culture from European peoples as well as from Christianity were streaming into the land. Of course, this is not the work of a generation or two, nor of a single movement, but of many generations and many movements. And who can deny that a great deal of work in all directions has been done by the various movements that have sprung up since, thus continuing and developing the work done by medieval mystics and saints such as Kabir and Nanak in the North, and Namdev, Tukaram, Ramdas and others in the South ?

As for the religious work proper of this body, there is very little that is original and that can be regarded as a new contribution to modern religious thought in Hindustan, much less in the world. The spiritual life in it has been just sufficient to maintain its own existence on a level which is far from high. It has had neither vision nor idealism such as was found in abundance in Bengal, and consequently there has been little of the passion for souls giving rise to missionary enthusiasm. The very few missionaries that it has had in its long career have all had to leave the mission-work of the Samaj for one reason or another \*, and it has to rest satisfied with such poor ministrations as can be given by laymen. A genuine vein of religious life, however, has been introduced in the Samaj which,

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\* Just now the Samaj has a mission-worker.

without it, would have been a barren wilderness of rationalism and secularism. This is due to the late Dr. Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar who, besides being an eminent Sanskritist, was a devout student of ancient Hindu scriptures. But more than all this, it was in Tukaram, one of the noblest Saints of Maharashtra, that he found a veritable gospel which he made his own and his influence has spread like leaven in the Prarthana Samaj. This eminent scholar's whole-hearted devotion to Tukaram, a man without much learning, is a remarkable fact not only in the history of the Brahma Samaj but in that of New Hindustan. His sermons are saturated with the noble spirit of this simple saint of Deccan, and they are a monument of his vast learning charged with deep reverence and devotion.\*

Bhandarkar's deep devotion made him more conscious of the religion of the Prarthana Samaj being a kind of New Dispensation.

If therefore, (he says) the doctrines adopted by the Prarthana Samaj are those found in the most developed forms of religion, be sure our religion is a revealed religion. It also is a revealed religion in two special senses. It is the only religion that acknowledges the influence and hand-work of God in all the religions that existed or now exist; and, therefore, imposes on us an attitude of sympathy towards all religious beliefs while hitherto antipathy between different religions has been the general rule. And the study of all the religions had the

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\* They are in Marathi and are published in a volume by D. G. Vaidya. Ranade's sermons also have been published by the same. Both these works have suitable introductions.

effect of clearing the religious vision so as to enable the leaders of the Samaj to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and has led them to adopt the highest form of truth that has ever dawned upon the human mind. It is in these two special senses that the dispensation followed by the Prarthana Samaj may be considered a New Dispensation.\*

Bhandarkar and after him many others in this Samaj owed much to the writings of Dr. Martineau, the great Unitarian leader of England. Among the many personal influences of the Brahma missionaries the most potent has been that of Pratap Chunder Moozamdar who came often and made long stays in Bombay and in other cities of the Presidency. Sir Narayan Chandavarkar was the President of the Samaj for many years, and he guided its affairs wisely and well. His personal life of piety, high position in life and eloquence were a source of attraction to many, but after his passing away some time back the Samaj has lost much of its power and influence. As said before, the work of this body has been mainly in the field of practical life, and consequently the output of its philanthropic work has been comparatively larger than that of other bodies of a similar kind. For many years it has been running several night schools, particularly for the poorer classes of Bombay. It has been maintaining, besides, a Foundling Asylum and Orphanage at Pandharpur, a well-known place of pilgrimage in Maharashtra, thereby saving and protecting the lives of a number of children every year. This place provides a

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\* "The Position of the Prarthana Samaj in the Religious World" a paper of Bhandarkar given in *Freedom, Religion and Reality*, edited by G. Y. Chitnis.

refuge for widows as well. This noble piece of work is due to the kind-hearted Lalshankar Umiashanker of Gujrat. While stationed in this place as a high Government official, he happened to see one day a newly-born infant exposed to die which led him to start the institution. Another piece of very important work that was started under the auspices of the Samaj, is what is known as the Depressed Classes Mission, a work which has now become a national concern. Though now this mission is independent of the Samaj, when it started and for years after, it formed a part of the Prarthana Samaj activities.

The question may well be asked—Is the cause of the Prarthana Samaj progressing or declining in the Bombay Presidency? To this there can be only one answer. Once there were more than a dozen Samajes scattered all over it, while to-day there are but three, namely, those of Bombay, Poona and Ahmedabad. At present it is in Bombay alone that the Samaj has some vitality. It has several institutions including a High School, and has an Anglo-Marathi weekly paper the *Subodh Patrica*. But even here the Prarthana Samaj has been gradually declining in strength within the last decade or two, not to go so far back as the time when the old leaders like Ranade and others used to draw people by their personalities. What is wanted is sacrifice and enthusiasm on the part of younger men, and unless a new spiritual impulse takes possession of them, the Bombay Prarthana Samaj will be overtaken by the same fate that has come upon other Samajes in the Province. Of late this Samaj has been showing some

enthusiasm, and we may well hope that it will go on increasing, for it is upon this that the future of not only this Samaj but of the whole cause depends in this part of Hindustan.

While the Bombay and Poona Prarthana Samajes may be regarded more or less as one, particularly as the Bombay Samaj has been largely or almost altogether an affair of the Marathi people and its chief leaders, both Ranade and Bhandarkar, have been men of Bombay as well as Poona, the Ahmedabad Prarthana Samaj deserves special mention. Of the people of Maharashtra and of Gujrat, the latter have much more in common with those of Bengal than the former. Though the Gujratis on the whole are a very practical people, they are highly impressionable. It was perhaps because of this similarity in their temperament that the deeply emotional Bhakti movement of the 15th and 16th centuries spread among them more than in other parts of the country. Whatever it be, the message of the Brahma Dharma found a rich response in the warm heart of Bholanath Sarabhai of Ahmedabad. Long before he had come to know anything of the Brahma Samaj or had much acquaintance with the English language, this venerable man had found his way by his own unaided efforts to pure Theism out of the tangle of idolatry and polytheism in which he believed at first with all his heart, but which failed to quench his genuine thirst for true religion. In his *Diary*,\* a document of much interest, we are told how he advanced step by step

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\* It is in Gujrati.



without almost any light from outside, and ultimately found himself by the side of the advanced thinkers of the Brahma Samaj movement. So great was his passion for true religion and spiritual life that he not only came as far as the Brahma Dharma of Devendranath, but understood and appreciated the later and the last stages of Keshub's life and work. Thus he presents in the whole history of the Brahma Samaj perhaps the only example of a man who travelled all the way from a genuine Hindu orthodoxy to almost as far as an equally genuine acceptance of the New Dispensation. What is of still greater interest is the fact that he passed in this his pilgrimage almost all the intermediate steps that were passed by the various leaders of the Brahma Samaj.

It was this Bholanath Sarabhai who, with the aid of Mahipatram Rupram, a social reformer of great courage of conviction who had defied his caste by going to England as early as 1860 and suffered much persecution in consequence, and a few others, started the Prarthana Samaj of Ahmedabad in 1871. Pratap Chunder Moozomdar came here often, and also other men from both the New Dispensation and the Sadharan Samaj visited Ahmedabad. Satyendranath Tagore, one of the sons of the Maharshi, who was stationed in Ahmedabad as the District Judge, also helped the Samaj in a number of ways. But the chief interest and inspiration of this Samaj lay in the life and work of Bholanath himself. Owing to this it succeeded from the first in gaining a number of members as well as active sympathizers. Soon a handsome Mandir was built, and a large number of ladies came to be do deeply interested

in the spiritual worship of the Samaj that they started a prayer-meeting of their own. In course of time the Samaj started a Widow's Home, an Orphanage and several other institutions. Much of the support of these came from Lalshankar Umiashankar. But from the first the central interest of the Samaj lay in its divine service which was of a unique character. Out of the abundance of devotional feeling and sentiment of his heart, Rishi Bholanath composed a number of songs and prayers and selected suitable texts from the Upanishads, and it is from this collection named *Prarthanamala* (Collection of Prayers) that songs are recited and prayers are offered week by week. There is provision made for about thirty weeks in the book when it is taken up once again. In many of its features this book resembles the Common Prayer Book of the Anglican Church. Its songs and prayers breathe forth a spirit of sincerity and devout feeling which cannot but strike a chord of response in tender hearts. However, once the feeling of novelty wears off, the book does sound monotonous in as much as there is not much variety in the nature of the songs. Another feature of the divine service in this Samaj is that most of its songs are sung by professional songsters employed solely for this purpose. This is undoubtedly a source of attraction to many people, but unfortunately it detracts from the solemnity of the divine service. This is, perhaps, the only Samaj in the country where such a practice is in vogue. The last of the leaders of this Samaj, Sir Ramanbhai Mahipatram, has just gone to his rest, and this Samaj is sadly in need of new leaders.

Another Samaj which may be said to belong to this group is the Brahma Samaj at Indore in Central India. Although its leaders have given it this name, it is very like the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay. In fact it was started by men who had come under the influence of the Bombay Samaj, and has been all along kept up largely by the efforts of men from Bombay and Poona.

The two Brahma Samajes of Sindh, namely the one at Hyderabad and the other at Karachi, have a character of their own. This Province, having come under the influence of Mohammedans and being cut off for centuries from the main currents of Hindu life, was in a way readier for the new cause. Besides, the Hindu population there has been influenced largely by Sikhism which, in many of its features, is very similar to Brahmanism. Owing to all this the social problem in the shape of a very complicated caste-system is non-existent there, and the people are free from idolatry also to a large extent. The new seed, therefore, fell on congenial soil, and as early as 1868, a Brahma Samaj was established in Hyderabad, the intellectual centre of Sindh. What made this Samaj a real power, not only in this city but in the whole Province, was the saintly life and example of Dewan Navalrai, a Government servant of high position, who soon attracted some of the very best men of the place. Later on his younger brother Hiranand gave himself entirely to the cause of the Brahma Samaj. His was a life of great self-sacrifice and purity of character due to which he has justly earned for himself the name

of Sadhu Hiranand. \* In fact both these brothers literally spent themselves in the service of their people, and so great were their sacrifices, piety, labours for the good of others, charity and purity of life that their memory is cherished with much reverence by the people of Sindh and the whole Brahma Samaj. Navalrai had sent his brother Hiranand for education to Calcutta in the eighties where he grew up under the influence of Keshub and his circle of friends including Ramkrishna Paramhansa. When Hiranand returned after finishing his education, he brought with him two or three of the finest young men of the New Dispensation Church. With the help of these Hiranand started many institutions, of which the most important was a model school for boys. But Hiranand's activities knew no bounds, and wherever there was a call for service, he was ever ready to respond to it even at the risk of his life. He died at the early age of thirty, and his brother soon followed him. Though their lives thus came to an untimely end, the example and influence of these two saintly brothers of Sindh will live for a long time inspiring numbers of young men to follow them in their self-less and godly lives.

Soon after Hiranand's death, Nandlal Sen, a nephew of Keshub who had come from Bengal with Hiranand, shifted to Karachi, and there he put new life and vigour into the life of the Samaj which had come into existence some time back owing mainly to the efforts of Navalrai.

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\* A Biography of his has been written by the late Dewan Dayaram Gidumal. It is an excellent book and every young man in India should read it.

Nandlal Sen was an original character and his methods of work were equally original. He was a complete recluse, and yet far from an ascetic though unmarried. He attended the divine service hardly once a year, and still he inspired everything that went on there. He was a man of iron will and much ability. But he lacked emotional powers and spiritual impulse, and was the very antithesis of his uncle in these matters. He could have done much more had he been better placed or had a living contact with men like himself, which unfortunately was denied to him in distant Sindh. Perhaps it was the loss of Hiranand and a little later that of his other friend who had come with him from Bengal through his acceptance of Christianity, which had something to do with his early and complete retirement from active life. Whatever it be, he worked in a most quiet and unobtrusive manner on a small circle of men that gathered round him and put real life and vigour in this Samaj.

In course of time this Samaj got a most self-less worker in Dr. Reuben, a Jew by birth and a doctor by profession who left his Government service at an advanced age when his pension was almost due, and surrendered himself to the call that came to him without thinking of the morrow. He is a remarkable singer of *bhajans* (devotional songs), and in his singing and dancing shows himself a true descendant of David. He is also a man of real faith. Nandlal Sen had undoubtedly a hand in moulding Dr. Reuben's character at least on the practical side of life, and it is that which has kept him steady at his post. The whole of Sindh and a large part of the Brahma Samaj in the whole country owes much to

this Jew Brahma, who is a living example of intense but none the less controlled devotional enthusiasm. It is a privilege to hear him sing and dance, and those who have once heard him can never forget him.

The Brahma Samajes in Sindh in general and the Karachi Samaj in special are indebted to some extent to T. L. Vaswani also. In the early stages of his life he owed a large part of his training to Nandlal Sen and his friend Bhawani Charan Bannerjee.\* He was a student in the school started by Hiranand in Hyderabad, and it was there that he came under the influence of Sen and Bannerjee, an influence especially of the first of these which continued many years after. After working for a long time for the Brahma Samaj not only in Sindh, but in Bengal and in the Punjab, he has now thrown himself into the cause of the spiritual uplift of the Youth of Hindustan. He has started the *Bharat Uvak Sangh* (Association of the Youth of Bharat-Varsh), and is a very well-known writer and speaker. In fact to-day he is one of the few great voices of the country. Though his connection with the Brahma Samaj is not what it once was, and perhaps he would not care to be known as a member of the Brahma Samaj, he himself would be the last to deny his great indebtedness to the Brahma leaders and especially to Keshub Chunder Sen. He is one of those few men who have carried the spirit of the Brahma Samaj and of the Nava Vidhan to a larger sphere.

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\* He joined the Christian Church while in Sindh. He joined at first the Anglican Church and then the Roman Church. Later on he threw himself into the Nationalist Movement of the years 1907-8, and died in gaol. To-day he is universally accepted as a Christian thinker and is known as Brahma Bandhav Upadhyaya.

Later on unfortunately serious differences arose in the Karachi Samaj, and it has been since broken up into two parties. This has marred the beauty and harmony of the whole movement in Sindh which gladly heard its message and was always ready to welcome its messengers wherever they went. The Hyderabad Samaj has been doing useful work in a variety of ways, and in Dewan Pribhdas who has been one of its chief leaders for many years it has a very active member and worker for the cause. Among the few men whose names must be recorded in connection with the history of the Brahma Samaj in this part of the country is that of the late Dewan Kauramal. He was a noble son of Sindh who rendered a real service to it by his many literary productions. Some of these were meant to help the spread of the Brahma Dharma. He was a cultured and devout man, and his ministrations from the pulpit were always edifying. Bhakta Rupchand is another. He devoted the latter part of his life to the cause, and helped many spiritually by his sweet singing.

Both these Samajes belong to the New Dispensation Church, to which adherence was given by Navalrai from the first.

Among other Provincial Samajes, the most important are those of the Punjab and Madras. Of these two Provinces, the former presented a splendid field of work for the cause of the Brahma Samaj owing to the large spread of Sikhism there. When Keshub first visited this part of Bharat Varsha in the sixties, the prospects of work so appealed to him that he is said to have

thought of settling down in the Punjab. It is quite likely that he may have been drawn to it. The Hindus including Sikhs here are more purely Aryan than the people of any other part of the country, and they have learnt, moreover, a number of wholesome lessons from their close contact with Mohammedans for centuries. They have much less of idolatry and caste than the rest of the Hindus in the country. The religious movement started by the Sikh Gurus was the best fruit of this contact between Hinduism and Islam. While these Gurus learnt many valuable lessons from the monotheistic faith of the Moslems, they at the same time prevented the growth of the proselytizing work of Islam, and made the people into a strong nation which successfully resisted the aggression of the Mohammedan conquerors. It was thus that the Sikh power rose and grew in the North. It is true this power was subdued by the British, but among the people there still existed elements of a strong nation, and provided a religious teacher of real merit arose among them, he might not only make them a great people, but through them might do much for the whole of Hindustan. Keshub was in the right line of succession of the great Gurus, and it is but natural that the Punjab should attract him in the way it did. He could not settle there however, and he had to rest satisfied with only sowing the seed. When he went there in 1867, he found several sympathizers both among the Punjabis and the Bengalis who had settled there. These had already started a Brahma Samaj at Lahore as early as 1863 under the leadership of a man called Navin Chunder Rai, a Bengali of literary talents and much



enthusiasm for the Brahma Cause. In course of time Pratap and several other missionaries went and stayed there some time, and they were very helpful to the Samaj in various ways. Under their influence, a Reform Association like the one in Calcutta was started, and various activities were taken up in connection with it. Maharshi Devendranath too visited the Samaj at Lahore more than once on his way to the Hills, and helped the local members much by his ministrations. Keshub came once more in 1873 when he aroused much enthusiasm among the members as well as the general public, so much so that the latter presented him with an address of welcome. The result of this together with the work done by Pratap and other missionaries who had stayed on the spot, and above all of the constant efforts of Navin Chunder Rai who remained here for years and was able to attract to the Cause a number of people by his example and influence, was that the Brahma Dharma began to take root in the Punjab, and several men came forward to dedicate themselves to the work of the Samaj. Among these last was Pundit Agnihotri, the same who later on started the Deva Samaj.

Meantime there came in the Punjab Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, and he carried away some of the members and sympathizers as well as much of the influence of the Brahma Samaj. Dayanand had tried to capture the Ahmedabad Prarthana Samaj and to convert it into an Arya Samaj, but Bholanath was too strong for him, and thus he could not do much in Gujrat in those days. But what was not possible for

him to do in his own Province, he succeeded in doing in the Punjab. It is true he did not convert the whole Samaj to his views, but much of its life and influence passed over to the new organization. From that time the Arya Samaj in the Punjab has continued to grow, and its influence from there has radiated to all the parts of Hindustan. In addition to this, the Punjab Brahma Samaj had to suffer much from the controversy that arose over the Cuch Behar marriage. In fact this was the only body out of Bengal that was affected by the marriage. As soon as the Sadharan Samaj was established in Calcutta, Pundit Agnihotri gave his allegiance to this body and resigned his membership of the Punjab Brahma Samaj because it had chosen to be neutral. He even started a rival organization and was ordained as a missionary of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj in 1881. He worked with great zeal for some years and attracted a number of young men, some of whom gave up secular work and dedicated themselves to the spread of the Brahma Dharma. After some time, however, Agnihotri separated from the Brahma Samaj altogether, and in course of time started an atheistic sect called the Deva Samaj in which he is worshipped as the Highest of the High.

In spite of all this, the Samaj did continue to grow, though slowly, gaining new adherents. Among its principal workers were Lala Kashi Ram, Babu Avinash Chunder Moozomdar, Bhai Prakash Dev and Bhai Sunder Singh. The last two of these were followers of Agnihotri, but when he left they joined the Samaj and the rival body thus came to an end. In course of time

these two were ordained as missionaries by the Sadharan Samaj, and they started an *Ashram*, a branch of the *Sadhanashram* \* of Calcutta, for the purpose of training missionaries. They and other members of the Samaj went on mission-tours to various parts of the Punjab and outside, and succeeded in rousing some interest. One or two new Samajes were formed, but on the whole the Brahma Samaj never prospered. All the four men mentioned above have gone to their rest, and very few men of their type have risen since to carry on their noble work.

The Brahma Samaj in the Punjab has established several institutions, the most notable of which is the Dayal Singh College in Lahore. A large amount of money was left for this purpose by one Sardar Dayal Singh, a great sympathizer of the Brahma Dharma. This college has had in the past and has even now many fine men of the Brahma Samaj from various parts of India working in it. It has been a centre of good and wholesome influence over the minds of a large number of young men during the short period of its existence, and we may well hope that it will continue to be so for a long time to come.

Though this Samaj on the whole has remained neutral, many of its members belong either to the New Dispensation Church or to the Sadharan Samaj. Bhai Lala Kashi Ram was ordained as a missionary of the

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\* We shall have occasion to speak of this later on in connection with the Sadharan Brahma Samaj.

New Dispensation and worked for many years devotedly on its behalf.

The\* South India Brahma Samaj had its beginning as early as 1864 when Keshub first visited Madras. A few young men who were then drawn to him and the cause he represented started the *Veda Samaj*. Their purpose in starting such a society was similar to that of the Bombay leaders, and thereby they wanted to make the progress of the new movement as smooth as possible. Unfortunately for this Samaj, the two men who were most enthusiastic for the cause soon passed away, and thus it received a serious blow. Soon after, however, one Shridharulu Naidu joined the Samaj and put new life into it. This noble young man came to know something of the Brahma Samaj in a far-off corner of the Madras Presidency and what little he knew of it inspired him so much that he "poor as he was, undertook a journey to Calcutta partly on foot and partly by such conveyance as chance threw in his way, till he arrived after a fatiguing journey without any letter of recommendation, without any known place where he could go, without any known man who could receive him or give him shelter.†" Once in Calcutta, he, however, found many friends, particularly among the missionaries of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. He stayed with them during the year 1865. On his return to his part of the country he began to preach Brahmaism, and in 1867 he settled in Madras carrying on the same work. In 1870

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\* This Samaj has been usually called Southern India Brahma Samaj.

† History of the Brahma Samaj, by Shastri.

Pratap visited Madras, and under his influence the Veda Samaj was converted into the South India Brahma Samaj, thereby giving up its compromising attitude. It then began to work in right earnest, and some branches were opened in different places. Unfortunately again, Naidu, who had worked for the cause with all his heart and soul, suffering innumerable hardships, poverty and persecutions, died of an accident in 1874, thus leaving the movement without any leadership worth the name.

This Samaj with its five or six branches, however, carried on its work and after the Cuch Behar marriage passed over bodily into the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. In course of time it has had several workers, but there have been hardly any who have worked steadily for the cause of the Samaj. The feeling cannot be resisted that, somehow or other, the work of the Brahma Samaj has not grown in this Presidency as it should have. In the people of Madras there is excellent material whether from the point of view of subtlety of intellect or tenderness of heart, but whether it be due to the extreme orthodoxy of the people or to the very strict caste-system prevailing there, the message of the Brahma Dharma has fallen more or less on deaf ears. Perhaps the very causes that have brought about the comparatively greater success of such movements as the Theosophical Society and the Ramkrishna-Vivekanand Mission in these parts have come in the way of the spread of reform movements like the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj.

The account given so far is of the Tamil people. The situation among the Telugu people on the whole

has been more hopeful. Several men have devoted themselves to the work of the Brahma Samaj, and their work has not been without response from the people. One of the outstanding men among the Brahmas was the late Veeresalingam Pantalu who, though not a missionary of the Samaj, helped the cause much by his writings. He was a great Social Reformer as well and has done much to improve the lot of widows. Sir Venkat Ratnam Naidu is another well-known man of the South, who has rendered a real service to the cause of the Brahma Samaj by his life and work. Among the people who devoted themselves entirely to the Samaj two men may be mentioned, namely, Bapiiah and Sambhashiva Rao. Both of them died young. The latter was ordained as a missionary of the New Dispensation Church which he served loyally to the end. The chief centres of the activities of the Brahma Samaj in these parts have been Rajamundhry, Maslipattam and Coconada. The Raja of Pithapur has always shown himself a great friend of the Brahma Samaj and has been a willing helper of the cause not only in these parts but all over Hindustan.

Three more Samajes in the South may be mentioned, namely, those of Hyderabad, Bangalore and Mangalore. The first two of these places are big centres of life and culture, and as such they will always find some people interested in the Brahma Samaj. But the population there being very mixed, it has been found difficult to interest a large number of local people in the cause. The Samaj there cannot be said to be an indigenous affair. The Hyderabad Brahma Samaj owes much to Prof. Velingkar, a man of Bombay who

has settled there. Of these three Samajes the most important is that of Mangalore on the West Coast. This Samaj is a link between the Bombay Prarthana Samaj and South India Brahma Samaj. Its beginning was a spontaneous affair on the part of one or two men of the place, Ullal Raghunathaya and Arsappa, who sent an invitation to Keshub in 1869 to come over and help them in starting a Brahma Samaj. Keshub could not go himself, but he sent Pratap with two other missionaries, and with their help a Samaj was started. For years after Raghunathaya worked for the cause under most disheartening circumstances owing to the extreme rigidity of the caste system among the people there. In course of time he came to be joined by Ranga Rao, a very sincere man, and both of them worked very hard for the Brahma Samaj. They also started work for the uplift of the Depressed Classes. In this they were pioneers, for it was about a decade after that that the Depressed Classes Mission came to be started in Bombay. Ranga Rao was a man with a real thirst for spiritual life, and at an advanced age was ordained in 1927 as a Sannyasi by an Arya Samaj Sannyasi. He had to do this as there was no such order in the Brahma Samaj, but he kept up his connection with the Samaj. He went to his rest in 1928. This Samaj was very much helped in every way by Bhai Baldeo Narayan, a missionary of the New Dispensation who lived here for a long time and worked among the people. He was a man remarkable for missionary enthusiasm, and being fired with such zeal went to preach the gospel of the New Dispensation to the people of Persia even at the risk of

his life. While engaged in this work he came to an untimely end at Bagdad dying of cholera.

Although most of these South India Brahma Samajes are called by the name of the Brahma Samaj, and there are a number of men among them who have discarded their thread and even some intermarriages have taken place, they are conducted largely on the lines of the Prarthana Samaj.



## Chapter XII

## THE SADHARAN BRAHMA SAMAJ

This Samaj, as mentioned before, was started as a result of the controversy over the Cuch Behar marriage. Some of the leading men who had taken part in its establishment were Anand Mohan Bose, Shiv Chunder Dev, Pundit Shivrath Shastri and Bijay Krishna Goswami. The last of these was the only missionary of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj who left Keshub in order to join the seceding party. He was a remarkable man and was one of the very first to join the missionary body which came into existence with Keshub's connection with the Brahma Samaj. He was a lineal descendant of one of the foremost disciples of Chaitanya, and thus had behind him an ancestry more sacred than that of any other in the Brahma Samaj. This was not all. He had the spirit of *bhakti* in him in an abundant measure, and the first devotional development of the Brahma Samaj was due to him to a large extent. His reforming zeal was in no way less than his *bhakti*, and perhaps he was one of the very first to discard his thread. He had done much to spread the cause of the Brahma Samaj, especially in Bengal, and a large number of men were drawn through him to the cause. The only defect in his character, perhaps, was that he was extremely impulsive, and always obeyed to the full the impulse that was uppermost in his mind. This led him sometimes to act in a way contrary to his best nature, and made him perhaps a little unsteady. In obedience to one such impulse he had taken part in the protest that arose in connection with the alleged man-worship at Monghyr, but later on recanted and joined Keshub's party again.

When this second protest and consequent schism came, he took a very leading part in it, especially in what may be called the spiritual upbuilding of the new organization. It is doubtful if the new Samaj would ever have come to possess that religious influence which it had, for however short a time, without his personality, enthusiasm and work. His spiritual hunger and thirst, however, were too great to be satisfied in the new Samaj, the nature of which was largely secular. Hence differences arose soon between him and the other leaders, and in a few years he not only separated himself from the Sadharan Brahma Samaj but severed all his connection with the Brahma Samaj in general, and started a mystical sect of his own in which the *bhakti* element predominated over every other. Taken all in all, he was one of the noblest men that the Brahma Samaj has ever had among its members.

Pundit Shivnath Shastri, who remained to the end of his life one of the principal leaders of this Samaj, was one of the twenty-one young men who were initiated at the inauguration of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj in 1869. He was a distinguished graduate of the Calcutta University, and had real literary powers which would have made him a writer of importance if he had devoted himself to vernacular literature. But the life of the Brahma missionaries with whom he came in close contact while he was a student, attracted him to the cause, and he thought of dedicating himself entirely to it. There was one difficulty, however, in regard to this matter, for he had two wives having been married to both of them by his father while quite young. He could not

be a regular missionary owing to this and so he worked as an associate of the missionary body. He stayed in the Bharat Ashram and helped the cause in whatever way he could. It was here that some serious difference arose between him and Keshub over the question of some personal discipline he was undergoing for the purpose of qualifying himself for missionary work. In consequence of this he separated, and ever since took up a most antagonistic attitude towards Keshub, his ideals and work. He took a principal part in the opposition that grew against Keshub during the period immediately preceding the Cuch Behar marriage, an opposition which culminated in the schism. Now that this Samaj had come into existence, he gave up his lucrative service and became one of its missionaries. This was a great sacrifice on his part. He served the Sadharan Samaj for nearly forty years after that, and it must be said to his credit that to a large extent it is his efforts which have shaped the character of the Samaj. As for his literary work, the only thing of importance that he wrote was his "History of the Brahma Samaj" in English, a voluminous work in two volumes involving much labour.\* So great was his antagonism towards Keshub to the last, even long after that great man had passed away, that it appears all through this work detracting from its value. He has written some other things also, both in Bengali and in English.

Babu Shivchunder Dev had known the Brahma Samaj in all its stages. He had attended the meetings of

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\* He wanted to add a third volume to this, but this could not be done.

the Brahma Sabha before it came under the influence of Devendranath, and had given some help to the latter in the re-organization of the Sabha. Later on he joined the progressive Brahmas under Keshub, and helped the work of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. When the Sadharan Brahma Samaj was started, he became one of its leaders. The name of Anand Mohan Bose is well-known throughout the country, particularly for his political activities in connection with the Congress, over which he presided once. He had a distinguished academic career, was perhaps the first Cambridge Wrangler in the country and was called to the bar. Even before he went to England for his studies, he had been taking an active part in the work of the Samaj, being initiated into it along with others in 1869. He continued to take the same interest in the Samaj affairs after his return from England. He along with many others in those days had a genuine passion for the principles and forms of parliamentary government, and so he busied himself with the question of constitution in the Samaj. Social Reform also engaged his attention. All along he had the highest regard for Keshub, and he entered into the controversy with him over the marriage with much pain. He was one of the few men who separated from Keshub with a real pang in his heart. He was a capable man, and though only thirty-one when the new Samaj was formed, he was made its President. In this capacity of his and later on as a most prominent member of the Samaj, he rendered it very good service, especially in the matter of framing the constitution and in the wise guidance that he gave to it all his life. His

activities were not confined to the Samaj. He was one of the founders along with Surendranath Bannerjee of the Indian Association. His interests were varied and he took part in most of the important activities of the time, but at the back of it all his heart was set upon God and the Brahma Dharma. It is not without reason therefore, that he is looked upon as a citizen-saint.

These men and a few others set about organizing the Sadharan Samaj in right earnest. One of the first tasks with which the new body was occupied was to have a proper constitution. Shastri says :

\* The thought that was uppermost in the minds of its first organizers and that immediately concerned them was to introduce constitutional modes of government in the affairs of the Church. They had suffered bitterly from the lack of such methods. Their protracted struggle for years with Mr. Sen and his party, as related before, had taught them that valuable lesson. They were naturally anxious to lay the foundations of the newly established Samaj well and secure on a lasting constitutional basis. Accordingly the framing of the rules laying down that basis engaged their first attention. Day after day, week after week were spent by the newly appointed committee in anxious deliberations, sometimes stretching far into the night, to decide upon important points connected with the main outlines of that constitution. This rule-framing was a tedious business, which occupied them for many months.

The constitution made thus was a very complex one, and it was meant to leave as little room as possible for the personal ascendancy of any man, however great he may be. The evident desire of the framers of the constitution was to make the Samaj fully democratic. It

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\* History of the Brahma Samaj.

is perhaps no exaggeration to say that, owing to the absence of any definite Revelation or Scripture binding upon all the members, of all the religious institutions in the world, this Samaj is the most purely democratic, *i.e.* ruled entirely by the will of the majority. Under the circumstances, although it may not have witnessed so far such a scene as the one in the old days of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj wherein the attributes of God were decided upon by a show of hands, it is quite possible that such things may happen. In it there is always present the anomaly of a man possessing the ripe age and experience of a Shivrath Shastri being outvoted in matters of vital importance by a couple of boys just emerging out of their teens. The constitution, therefore, instead of being ridden over by the members has been over-riding them, and the Samaj is reduced to a kind of machine wherein the personal power of a leader, however big, can play a very small part. To this Shastri himself has testified while noting the defects of the Samaj :

\* The second defect appertains to the working of its constitution. It is the lack of what may be called *personal guidance*.† No end of sub-committees have been appointed from time to time to promote specified objects, but most of these sub-committees have been ineffective, owing to the constant change of office-bearers and committees, depriving these bodies of a chance of a concentrated sense of responsibility and constant personal supervision... Briefly speaking, the constitution of the Samaj, as it stands at present partly illustrates the principle, that "the work of many is the work of none."... Thus

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\* History of the Brahma Samaj.

† The italics in this passage are his own.

the constitutional machinery works on very much in the rut of routine without any great *power of initiative* or *combining force*. The above-mentioned defect is the most serious one, in as much as many of the provincial Samajes that at one time made common cause with the Samaj and placed great hopes in its guidance, have, in course of time, ceased to take an active interest in its work, and have become indifferent to its proceedings... Thus the Sadharan Brahma Samaj has not succeeded in making itself felt as an all-India concern.

Another thing of importance that this Samaj did soon after it came into existence was to have a big Mandir of its own. Some of the leading members contributed their income for one month for this purpose, and their example was followed by many others. Maharshi Devendranath also made a generous contribution, and so did some others who were not members of the Samaj. A site was bought on the Cornwallis Street, and on it was built the prayer-hall that stands there to-day. The ceremony of the laying of the foundation-stone has been thus described :

\* Babu Shivchandra Dev, as the oldest member of all amongst us, laid the stone where a stone bottle containing the first numbers of the *Samalochak*, the *Tattwa-Kaumudi* and the *Brahma Public Opinion*, and a parchment roll bearing the following words had been previously placed:

“The foundation of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj Mandir was laid this day the Eleventh of Magh Sak 1800, corresponding with 23rd of January, 1879, Christian Era, on the 49th Anniversary of the Brahma Samaj.”

The papers mentioned here were the various organs of this Samaj. The first two had come into existence

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\* History of the Brahma Samaj.

just before the starting of the Samaj, and the last one was started soon after. The entirely secular character of the new Samaj could not have manifested itself more completely than in this act of founding it on the Public Opinion of the People.

The Mandir that was thus built is a pretty big one, and a good deal of the activity of the Samaj has centred round it. In course of time, several Brahma families came to stay in its neighbourhood forming what is called *Brahma Para*, and institutions like the *Sadhan-Ashram* and the *Devalaya* grew round about it supplementing the work of the Samaj in some ways.

The Samaj started a model school for boys with the idea of giving moral and religious instruction to them in addition to the usual course of studies. Along with the Brahma leaders, Surendranath Bannerjee worked for this school, and he became even a teacher thereof. Several institutions were started in connection with this school with the idea of fostering its religious atmosphere, a number of Brahmas came forward to serve as teachers in it, and the school became a centre of influence for the Brahma cause. This *City School* as it was called at first developed later on into the *City College*, an institution which has been a power for good in the student community of Calcutta. For a long time it was the only Brahma college in the whole of Hindustan, the Dayal Singh College at Lahore coming into existence in comparatively recent times. The City College is at present under the able management of Principal Hiram Chandra Maitra, who is well-known for his high culture and character.



This Samaj made special efforts to give to the children of Brahma parents proper instruction in the principles of the Brahma Dharma. For this purpose Sunday Schools and such other institutions were started. Also a school for girls was started with a hostel attached to it so that girls from the mofussil might take advantage of it. Hundreds of girls have passed through this *Brahma Girls' School* as it is called, receiving thus the benefits of higher education. It is probably due to this school that the women of this Samaj stand pretty high in general education and culture.

It has been mentioned before that many of the members of this Samaj had long been working for the cause of the emancipation of women. Now that they had a free hand, some of them tried in all sorts of ways to put into practice the principle of equality between man and woman. In this they often exposed themselves to the legitimate criticism and even ridicule of the public. In spite of some extravagance, however, substantial work was done by the Samaj in the direction of imparting general culture and refinement to many of the women of the community. Babu Umesh Chunder Datt, a prominent member of this body, had long been interested in the question of the moral and intellectual uplift of women, and ever since this Samaj was started he threw himself whole-heartedly in the work. He started a paper for them, and institutions like the Banga Mahila Samaj were started. Later on this kind of work was taken up by the women themselves.

While all this work was going on, the Samaj missionaries, particularly Bijay Krishna Goswami and

Shivnath Shastri, were very active in preaching the ideals of the Samaj. They went about all over Bengal, and Shastri went as far as Bombay and Madras. Their chief purpose at this time was to create public opinion in their favour among the existing Samajes and to make them join the Sadharan Samaj. That they carried this controversial spirit with them is fully evident from the fact that Shastri, while out on one of these tours in the Madras Presidency in 1881, wrote and published a book called "The New Dispensation and the Sadharan Brahma Samaj," a book in which he attacked most virulently all the ideals of Keshub. Happily this book has been since allowed to go out of print and thus die a natural death. Both these men also started new Samajes wherever possible. As a result of their efforts, several Samajes, particularly in Bengal, gave their adherence to the Sadharan Samaj.

Of missionaries this Samaj had four to begin with. Besides the two mentioned above, there were Ramkumar Vidyaratna and Agnihotri from the Punjab. All these were regularly ordained with a charge from the Executive Committee of the Samaj in 1880. It is painful to say that of these first four missionaries of the Sadharan Samaj, with the exception of Shivnath Shastri, all the others left the Brahma Samaj, Goswami in 1886, Agnihotri in 1887 and Vidyaratna in 1891. The first two of these started sects of their own, while the last who had begun to put on *gairic* cloth while in the Samaj very probably joined one of the existing sects. Thus the new Samaj was, within almost a decade of its existence, deprived of the majority of its first missionaries, two of

whom at least were most important and had rendered great services not only to the Sadharan Brahma Samaj but to the Brahma Samaj in general. This is not all. They went not only themselves, but carried away with them some of the members as their followers, thus rendering the Samaj much weaker. Bepin Chandra Pal also was a missionary of this Samaj once. He left it long since, and worked for Neo-Vaishnavism among other things. In course of time other men such as Navadvip Chandra Das and Nagendranath Chatterjee, to mention only the more prominent among them, joined the ranks of missionaries, and in more recent times men like Hem Chandra Sarkar and Sudhir Chandra Bannerjee have joined, but the mission-work of this Samaj has never been done with the same zeal that was witnessed in the first few years of its existence. The present writer well remembers a friend, who has given his adherence to the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, telling him that the most active work of this Samaj in the field of missionary effort was done in the first few years when Keshub was living, and his new ideals and efforts for the spread of his New Dispensation were a constant challenge to the new body to show a similar activity, and that soon after Keshub's passing away there was a lull in this Samaj as in Keshub's own Samaj.

An important piece of work done by this Samaj during the first few years was the starting of what may be called a "Back to Raja Ram Mohan Roy" movement. The religious ideals of the Samaj were those of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj, especially as it was before the development that took place from the year

1875 onwards. It held by the catholicity of that Samaj as well as the principle and practice of the brotherhood of man which it had followed abolishing all caste-distinctions within itself. In course of the performance of the consecration ceremony of the prayer-hall in the Declaration of Principles read on the occasion, it was said :

The catholicity of Brahmaism shall also be preserved here. No book or man shall ever be acknowledged as infallible and the only way to salvation : but nevertheless due respect shall be paid to all scriptures and the good and great of all ages and of all countries. In the sermons, discourses and prayers used in this Hall, no scripture or sect, or founder of a sect, shall ever be ridiculed, reviled, or spoken of contemptuously.

But this stage of the Brahma Samaj was to a very large extent dominated by, almost identified with, the influence and personality of Keshub whom the Sadharan Samaj for the moment did not care to recognise as its leader, nor was it possible on its part to look upon Devendranath as such with his limited ideas on matters of catholicity and caste-abolition. It was probably owing to this that it was thought necessary to fall back upon the first great leader as the ideal man of the Brahma Samaj. Hero-worship is one of the most natural instincts of man, and the members of the new Samaj in spite of all their protests happily proved no exception to this rule. It is very difficult to say with whom the idea of this "Back to Ram Mohan" movement arose. It is said by some that it originated with Miss Collet, the English lady who, though an orthodox Christian, had been much attracted towards the Brahma Samaj and Keshub himself, and made the movement known to the British

public by her writings and especially her Brahma Year-Books. When Keshub was in England, she helped him to the best of her ability, and later on she published all the speeches that he gave while there. After the Cuch Behar marriage, however, she became extremely antagonistic to Keshub and all his ideals, and remained so to the end.

Whatever be the origin of this movement, there can be no doubt that Ram Mohan deserved this recognition, tardy as it was. Hence, soon after the secession, a memorial meeting in honour of Ram Mohan Roy began to be held from the year 1879. The Adi Samaj and the Sadharan Samaj combined together for this purpose, and Keshub also held a separate meeting of his own. Now all the three bodies unitedly celebrate this function in honour of the founder of the Brahma Samaj, their spiritual father. It is not, besides, in Calcutta alone but in many cities and towns of the country, that the anniversary of Ram Mohan is held, and not only Brahmas but people of all communities and creeds pay their yearly tribute of homage to this father of New Hindustan. Another important result of this movement was the writing of two excellent biographies of the Rajarshi, one in Bengali by Nagendranath Chatterjee and the other in English by Miss Collet\*. A fresh interest began to be taken not only in the name of Ram Mohan, but in his life and work: it was this that led to the writing of these books. The English biography

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\* This work was left unfinished by her, but some one else finished it from the materials she had left. This work is since published by Hem Chandra Sarkar.

has already made its way as a classic of Indian biographical literature, while the Bengali work has already been translated into one more vernacular of the land.

It has been already said that in this Samaj there were several men who were deeply interested in a variety of public activities. These men were devoted to the Brahma Dharma too, and they took care to spread its influence in their respective fields of action. In this way the work of the Samaj began to grow in various directions, and institutions, whether of a purely religious character such as the holding of regular divine service or of a socio-religious character such as social gatherings in which moral and religious subjects might be lectured upon or discussed, were started for various classes of people, such as railway clerks, working men etc, in different suburbs of Calcutta. Activities of this kind spread far beyond Calcutta also. The most important of these was the *Khasi Mission*, which was commenced in 1889. This work was started at the request of some people from these Hills, who were eager to embrace Brahmanism. This Mission was very fortunate in getting, almost from the start, the services of a devoted man called Nilmani Chakravarti, who has been working ever since on these Hills for the cause of the Brahma Dharma. The work has grown under him and the Hill people have gladly heard the gospel preached to them. A number of people have joined the Brahma Samaj and some have even devoted themselves to it. A few branch samajes have been opened, and the work has promise of future growth in it.

A very important institution of the Samaj was the *Theological Institution*, started with the object of spreading higher theological knowledge, particularly among young men. This was very like the Theological Schools of Devendra and Keshub. It found from the first a very useful man in the person of Pundit Sitanath Tattwabhushan who, besides being a student of Western philosophy, has been a close student of Hindu philosophy and Shashtras as well, particularly the Upanishads and the Bhagwad-Gita. While he taught he gained much in knowledge himself, and he has embodied his knowledge and experience in several books that he wrote later on. One of his books is "The Philosophy of Brahmaism", wherein he has tried to give a philosophical exposition of the Brahma Dharma. The Theological Institution does not seem to have worked all the time regularly but by fits and starts, and not always in the same shape. At one time this Samaj had a regular Theological School, in which young men were being systematically trained for mission work. Though many people may not have taken advantage of this School or the Institution, there is no doubt that both of them have been helpful in giving some definite knowledge of Brahma Theology to a number of young men.

An institution still more important that may be mentioned is the *Sadhanashram*. This was meant, as its name implies, for the spiritual training of missionaries. Its work was to be carried on those very lines which Keshub had followed all along in the working of the missionary body of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. The machinery of the constitution of the new Samaj

had already begun to prove too complex for any missionary work of real worth to be done. It required from those who would do mission-work of the Samaj a kind of submission to the authority of laymen, which very few men who had sacrificed their all at the altar of God were prepared to give. This proved a great stumbling-block in the way of new men coming forward to serve as missionaries. Already most of the first missionaries had left the Samaj owing to one cause or another, and the very few that were there were finding the yoke of the various committees and sub-committees too heavy to be borne. Shastri, who was the foremost in his demand for constitution, was the first to feel this yoke most keenly, and so he started in 1892 this Ashram where workers might be trained under him altogether independently of the Executive Committee of the Samaj. In order to do this in an effective manner, the workers were required to take no regular pay from any organised body, but were to depend on the contributions of sympathizers and friends. This was just the principle on which the support of the missionaries of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj was carried on, a principle which the Sadharan Brahma Samaj had discarded. It was but natural, therefore, that the Executive Committee should take umbrage at this, particularly as Shastri himself was responsible to it as its ordained missionary and as one receiving a regular pay from it. It, however, "organized a rival body of workers, called the Sevak-Mandli, with almost similar ideals\*." Continuing the account Shastri says: "Thus there was

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\* History of the Brahma Samaj.



a cleavage in the small missionary body. Fortunately, however, this unwholesome rivalry was soon removed by our leading men putting their heads together and discovering a way of united action. The Ashram was placed under the Executive committee, and a new constitution was formed for it, combining the Ashram and the Sevak-Mandli." Thus the Executive Committee had its own way after all, and the Ashram became more or less a Samaj affair. It, however, did attract a few men who helped in carrying on the mission-work of the Samaj in various ways, and some of them came to be ordained as regular missionaries. In course of time, this Ashram came to have two or three branches, one in Dacca, another in Lahore and the third in Bankipore. In spite of all these attempts, however, the missionary strength of the Sadharan Samaj has been very poor in comparison with that of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj and the New Dispensation Church. Shastri himself while mentioning the defects of the Samaj admits this :

\* The fourth noticeable defect has been the lack of missionary spirit among its members....But the mission department of the Samaj has been the weakest part of its machinery. Somehow or other, it has failed to inspire, invigorate, and keep together its missionaries. The foregoing history bears sad witness to many secessions among its mission-workers, till the number of its ordained missionaries represents the poor figure of five at the end of thirty five years...The prevailing tone of the members seems to be to discourage self-surrender and self-consecration. As a consequence of this, the missionary spirit is very feeble in the body.

There is ample cause for this lack of missionary spirit in the Sadharan Samaj. It started its existence with a secular bias, and it has all along remained true to its first inclination. Years ago Miss Collet had called most of those who started this Samaj secularists; and they and their followers in the second generation have justified that characterization. It is owing to the same cause that this Samaj has practically made no original or important contribution to the religious life of New Hindustan. Eminent men such as Anand Mohan Bose, Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose the great Scientist, Dr. P. K. Roy, Dr. Sir Nil Ratan Sarkar, Dr. P. C. Ray, Krishna Kumar Mitra and Ramanand Chatterjee both of whom are well-known journalists, Dr. Brajendranath Seal the great scholar and several others, have been in the past and are still its members. But it has had so far no man of real religious genius nor any outstanding religious personality such as Devendranath or Keshub or Pratap or even of the type of Ranade or Bhandarkar. The Samaj is equally poor in its literary output, and it has to its credit not a single such work as can be placed by the side of works produced by the Adi Samaj or the New Dispensation Church. In its protest against Keshub and all his ideals, it positively turned its face from all higher religion. It has what is called the superstitious dread of superstition, and it has, therefore, avoided all those things in religion which cannot be understood by plain reason. The Brahmas of this Samaj have made a positive religion of pure rationalism, and it is undoubted that of all the sections of the Brahma Samaj it is the most rationalistic. As such it has all the defects usually associated with rationalism.

The aim with which this Samaj started its work, and what results it achieved or failed to achieve will be evident from the following passages from Shastri's History.

But this constitutional organization is not the only work that the members of this Samaj have achieved. There lies behind a far more important spiritual work which they have quietly done. They positively turned their faces from that peculiar development of religious life which for want of a better name may be called "*Ascetic Yogeeism*," which became so prominent and fashionable in the New Dispensation section of the Church after the second schism, and they tried to cultivate that simple and natural piety which had been marked out by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and was also accentuated by the old Brahma Samaj of India, and which consisted in simple love of God, the cultivation of daily piety and the unostentatious service of man.

In a way this was an attempt to reduce the religion of the Sadharan Samaj to the highest common factor of the teachings and lives of the three great leaders of the Brahma Samaj, an attempt which could not but result in pure Rationalism. As regards the fruit of such a religion, while mentioning the defects of the Samaj, Shastri says :

The first and foremost, perhaps, is the want of success that has characterized our efforts to establish a habit of domestic devotion amongst our members. If I have rightly understood the significance of the mission of the Brahma Samaj, it certainly lies in making natural and rational religion a source of spiritual inspiration and edification enforcing habits of individual and domestic piety..... In stating this, I must sorrowfully confess that the members of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj have not yet paid sufficient attention to this part of their duty. Perhaps the defect is due to the negligence on the part of its missionaries and preachers in enforcing this duty.

As for its constitution and the limitations it has brought along with it, something has already been said. Shastri says that it has failed to bring "power of initiative" as well as "combining force." It has thus failed to secure much personal power as well as co-operation, without both of which no work of any importance can be done. From the first the new Samaj put all its emphasis on constitution and organization, and the missionaries as well as the prominent members of the Samaj tried their utmost to bring in as many Brahma Samajes as possible together under one organization. In this also the Sadharan Samaj has failed. At one time many Samajes came forward to be parts of this body, but soon they fell away. Shastri says:

In response to its appeals for association, out of more than 130 Samajes not more than 40 or 45 have come forward during this period for association, and not more than 20 or 25 Provincial Samajes have taken care to elect their representatives on the General Committee. The others are standing aloof as neutrals, though many perhaps of these Samajes still sympathize with the principles of the Samaj. Thus the Sadharan Brahma Samaj has not succeeded in making itself felt as an all-India concern.

The consciousness of failure is, perhaps, the keenest in this Samaj, and some of the principal men who had a hand in starting this body may well have thought later on if they were well-advised in seceding from the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. In a way this was the greatest blow that was dealt to the all-India character of the Brahma Samaj, a blow from which it has never recovered. It took its life-blood, and with the breaking up of the

Brahma Samaj of India much of its influence vanished. Hence some of the old leaders of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj and the new leaders that have come since have been feeling that this Samaj has not been able to contribute anything of great importance to the religious life of the country, much less to that of the world. Dr. Nil Ratan Sarkar, a very prominent member of this body and once its President, was altogether silent about the contribution of this Samaj in his excellent Presidential address at the Theistic Conference of 1915. He does not mention even its name in it, although he very carefully weighs the contribution made in the first three stages, namely, those under Ram Mohan, Maharshi and Keshub. Perhaps he is not alone in thinking thus. Happily there are signs of a healthy change coming over the body. Most of the old leaders are gone, and with them many of the old animosities are buried. As time goes Keshub is being understood more and more, and his teachings, at least a part of them, are finding their way into the heart of this Samaj. Even the old leaders including Shivanath Shastri came to recognise that the religion of the Brahma Samaj was a veritable New Dispensation as Keshub taught, and the great ideal of the Harmony of Religions is being accepted more and more by them all. Numerically this Samaj is the biggest and the more it imbibes the spirit of Keshub, the more its influence is bound to be felt all over Hindustan.

This account of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj cannot be completed without mentioning one or two influences for good in it. Pandit Sivanath Tattvabhusan's

name has been already mentioned. His writings, which form perhaps the only important contribution to religious thought made by this Samaj, have a constructive value and are helpful to all students of philosophy and religion. This is due largely to his sharing of Keshub's ideals. While referring to his "Debt to Keshub" he said :

\* When the Sadharan Brahma Samaj was established... I had no fundamental theological differences with Keshub..... Even when the New Dispensation was promulgated my views scarcely differed from Keshub's..... That religion was a developed form of Brahmaism, a form much in advance of the simple and almost bald Theism of the Adi Brahma Samaj. The doctrines of Great Men, Inspiration, Dispensation, Yoga, *Bhakti* and *Yoga*, were not "aberrations," but valuable additions made by Keshub to the entire creed.

The other influence is that of the late Babu Shashipad Bannerjee. He was a remarkable man in many ways and in all the things that he did he took a line of his own. Although he was as keen an *anusthanic* Brahma as any other, he regarded himself as a reformed Hindu. He was as great a social reformer as a social servant, a unique combination in sixties and seventies. The record of his services on behalf of widows, working men and in fact whosoever may have need of any kind reads like a romance. He had his own ideas of religious reform and toleration which he tried to put into practice and propagate. As early as 1873 he established

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\* Navavidhan, May 3, 1928.

† This was the name given to those who practised full Brahmaism by giving up caste and idolatry.

an institution called the Sadharan Dharma Sabha (Universal Religious Association). Its aim was to bring about the union and mutual co-operation of the various religious bodies of the country without, at the same time, any surrender of their peculiar doctrines and practices. It seems to have languished for some time. The idea, however, never left him and he developed it later on. It grew into what is called the *Devalaya* (the Abode of God). This association was founded in 1908, and it is a kind of Inter-Religious Fellowship. Its trust-deed says that it is an association for "devotional exercises, and for literary, scientific, philanthropic and charitable works. It aims at the promotion of religious devotion and the establishment of unity, brotherly feeling, and mutual co-operation among the various communities of the country without any surrender of their respective peculiar doctrines and practices." Babu Sashipada has endowed this institution and given his house in Cornwallis Street to it. This Devalaya has a large membership of over a thousand people belonging to all communities and creeds. Every day a divine service is held in it and one finds people of all creeds taking part in it and preaching their own special doctrines. The house where these services are held is only next door to the Sadharan Samaj Mandir, and some of the Brahmas sympathize much with this movement. The idea underlying the Devalaya is certainly a novel one, and perhaps that is why it has had a sort of attraction for some people. But it is hardly consistent with either the Brahma Dharma or the Nava Vidhan (New Dispensation).

Although Keshub said at one time that all religions were true, his eclecticism was Christo-centric and that is what made it an organic whole. But apart from such a living centre, it is but a step from it to the Devalaya. Thus as it were in the very heart of the Sadharan Samaj, which is the most rationalistic and iconoclastic section of the Brahma Samaj, such a strangely syncretistic movement has grown. Extremes meet.

One is rather surprised to see the great poet Ravindranath Tagore speaking of the Devalaya in these terms :

When a seed germinates, it rends the earth, but when it develops into a full-grown tree with its branches and twigs, it gives shade to the earth. Time was when the Brahma Samaj raised its head in and through opposition. The establishment of the Devalaya is a proof positive of the fact that the day of struggle and opposition for the Brahma Samaj is drawing to a close. It is my belief that they alone have rightly understood the mission of the Brahma Samaj who are attempting to provide in the shade of this huge tree a common meeting ground for all.

In the absence of any definite basis or norm for its religion, is it any wonder if the pendulum should swing to the other extreme? Let us hope, however, that out of the clash of these two tendencies, one too negative and the other too positive, the middle course will commend itself more and more to the people of this Samaj.



## Chapter XIII

## THE NEW DISPENSATION CHURCH

## II

Keshub was removed from the Church of the New Dispensation within about three or four years after its establishment, very much as Ram Mohan had left the Brahma Sabha only two years after it had come into existence. There was this difference, however, that when Keshub passed away, his followers had before them the experience of half a century of the life of the Brahma Samaj. Unfortunately this did not help them much. Keshub had lived and worked so intensively during the last few years of his life that it had been difficult for his immediate followers, with the solitary exception of Pratap, to understand the full significance of his work. Many of his followers were men of great worth in their own way, but there was hardly any who could lead the whole Church. Besides, the result of some of the later work of Keshub had been to develop too much of the spirit of independence. Keshub had noticed this and tried to remedy it in a variety of ways. One of the chief of these was to establish an institution called the Apostolic Durbar (Chamber of Missionaries), composed only of the missionaries of the Church. The duty of this body was to deal with the spiritual problems of the Church, and it was bound by the rule that whenever it wanted to act in regard to any matter, it could do so only in entire concert and unanimity.

This Durbar met soon after Keshub's death, and passed a resolution that the *Vedi*, the seat in the Mandir wherefrom Keshub had preached so often, should be kept vacant always in honour of his memory. This was an act which Keshub himself would never have sanctioned. It went against all the principles of theistic worship laid down by Ram Mohan, the Maharshi, and Keshub himself. The Nava Samhita, Keshub's last legacy to his Church, was against a step such as this. When this resolution was passed, Pratap was not present. He was on his way back from the West where he had gone to give the message of the New Dispensation. It is very doubtful if the Durbar could or would have passed it if he had been on the spot. But once it was passed, the Durbar stuck to it with a persistence which was short only of a sense of infallibility of its decrees. Not only did Pratap refuse to accept this resolution but he most strongly protested against it in his capacity as a member of the Durbar and as the Secretary of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj as well as of the Calcutta congregation. He had support in this of many of the laymen and of some missionaries too. Thus it happened that there was a split in the Durbar, and moreover, the major portion of the Durbar backed up by Keshub's family in whose charge the Mandir still was, came in direct conflict with the Calcutta congregation. Thus at one stroke of a thoughtless and hasty action on the part of the Durbar, the entire Church of the New Dispensation was split up into various parties, and its character and position were compromised in the eyes of the world.

The hidden cause of all this was the refusal of the majority of the missionaries to give the leadership of the Church to Pratap, to whom it rightly belonged by virtue of his high character, powers and personality. Taken all in all, he was certainly the fourth great man of the Brahma Samaj. He was a relative of Keshub, and being of about the same age they grew together in their boyhood and continued to do so all the time. He was thus his life-companion and foremost disciple too. Pratap thus speaks of their mutual relationship :

\* He grew with us and into us, from within, he was in perpetual contact with us. He was most natural, and made everything about him as wholesome as the earth and air. He was so true, strong, warm, elevated and magnetising that he became to me really a part of myself, the better part. He was like another self to me, a higher, holier, diviner self. Yes, we grew together: he in one direction, and I in a somewhat different. I was conscious of the difference ; but he grew into me, and I grew in a relationship which outlived the separation of death itself.

Under the guidance of Keshub he had matured his character and powers to such an extent that he had long been second only to Keshub. As early as 1870, when Keshub went to England, he left him the charge of the ministry of the Brahma Samaj. He had already shown great powers as a writer and speaker, particularly in English, and it was largely due to him that the position of the Brahma Samaj both in Bombay and in the Punjab had been consolidated. In these parts

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\* Auto-biographical notes. These are unpublished, but a part of them have appeared in the biographical sketch attached to Pratap's *Heart-Beats*.

and in fact all over the country he was universally honoured as a great Brahma leader. He had been already twice to the West, going in his second visit as far as America where his "Oriental Christ" had just appeared. His lectures in both England and America and this book had given him an international reputation. In addition to all this, he was the one man, not only in the New Dispensation Church but in the entire Brahma Samaj, who had hardly any thing in him of a partisan. Owing to all this he was really fitted to take the lead of the whole body. Had he chosen to be the leader of the Sadharan Samaj, the biggest section of the Brahma Samaj, he could have easily done so, for he was again and again asked by that Samaj to be their guide even in the life-time of Keshub. But he refused to do so even when, after Keshub's death, he was not only denied his rightful position but practically exiled from his Church and had to suffer petty persecutions from his erstwhile co-workers in a number of ways. He was too big a man to fall a prey to such temptations, and in spite of all the divisions and splits in which the New Church was divided he had too high an idea of the mission of the New Dispensation to leave it. His loyalty to his departed leader and friend was great, and he remained true to Keshub's principles and ideals all his life. Although denied access to the Brahma Mandir owing to the resolution of the Durbar which almost looked like idolatry, he carried on his work in various ways, gathering round him the best of laymen in the Church. He started a divine service of his own, and his spiritual

ministrations therein attracted people from outside his Church also. He busied himself with the re-organization of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj, and tried other means to bring about some kind of re-union between the various sections of the Brahma Samaj. He started work among students, and his lectures on religious and moral subjects were helpful to many. He did the same for women also. He went a number of times during these years to the various parts of the country, giving the message of the Nava Vidhan and strengthening the various Brahma and Prarthana Samajes. It also fell to his lot to go to Europe and America two or three times more during the course of about a quarter of a century that he lived after Keshub. Wherever he went he received a warm welcome, and created a profound impression on the mind of the public. He was an honoured representative of Hindustan and even of Asia at the great Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1892. The impression that he made in that historic gathering has been thus described by an American of note, Dr. Sunderland :

It is not too much to say that in the great religious Parliament, where he spoke many times, he was listened to with greater and more continuous eagerness and interest than any other speaker, American or foreign. And the interest was not curiosity; if it had been only that, it would quickly have spent itself; but everybody felt the spell of his eloquence and better still, all felt the depth and sincerity of his piety, and the mighty spiritual uplift of his utterances.

More than all this was his work in the field of religious literature. He wrote a number of books

during this period, and these are a permanent contribution to the religious life of New Hindustan. His "Oriental Christ" is a unique book, and will always find readers in all parts of the world. A translation of it has appeared in German. His "Life of Keshub" is a standard book which has appealed to the hearts of hundreds of young men, and will always continue to do so. It is an excellent biography and has few equals in biographical literature in this land. His "Heart-Beats" is a kind of spiritual autobiography, which is as interesting as helpful. To these may be added his "Spirit of God" and "Silent Pastor". While the former of these is of an abstract nature, though remarkable in many ways, the latter is very practical and devotional. It is said by some that this book is the deepest thing he wrote, for it is written not so much with ink as with blood. Had he not been forced to be silent by being excluded from his rightful place as the minister of the Nava Vidhan, we would never have known the *Silent Pastor*.

He was indeed a remarkable man, and he made a profound impression wherever he went. The present writer has again and again come across men who had heard Pratap more than a generation back giving testimony to this. An ex-minister of one of the biggest States, himself a Hindu, who had seen both Keshub and Pratap, told him that if the first of these was Christ, the second was the St. Paul of New Hindustan.

One thing unique about Pratap was that early in life he came to see the glory of Christ. This was in a vision which he had of him at the time when the progressive

Brahmas had separated from the Maharshi, and had not yet found their rest and solace in the new spiritual life that soon came to them in such abundance. It is singular that both Keshub and Pratap came to see the glory of Christ, each in his own way, at about the same time and altogether independently of each other. It was this which shaped their life and career to the great end of the spiritual regeneration of Hindustan. This vision grew with time, and Moozomdar has embodied it in his book "The Oriental Christ". It is quite in the fitness of things that he dedicated it to Keshub, and given in his Preface to it extensive quotations from the speeches of Keshub concerning Christ. Just as Keshub had largely to suffer from others in the Brahma Samaj owing to his great love for Christ, so Pratap too had to suffer for his Christo-centric faith from even his own fellow-believers of the Nava Vidhan.

During the period extending over thirty years or more after Keshub's death, the most important group in the Nava-Vidhan Samaj\* was the one which centred round the Prachar Ashram (Mission House). After Moozomdar had separated himself from the Durbar and two or three others with him, this party came to separate itself from another group therein which was dominated by the influence of Keshub's family. The Prachar Ashram group was composed of four or five missionaries who had no families of their own, no earthly ties to bind them to the world, all of them having lost

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\* The New Dispensation Church is known by this name also. The idea of the Church as a community is too deeply rooted in it for them to get rid of it soon.

their wives and some of them their children even in course of time. Completely unhampered thus, they carried on their work for many years with a spirit of self-sacrifice, devotion, trust in Providence and faithfulness to the ideals of their master, which are remarkable, and which form a chapter by themselves in the history of the Brahma Samaj. They continued to live the apostolic life which the missionaries of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj were required to live all along, and which was, besides, enjoined upon them as the apostles of the Nava-Vidhan with still greater emphasis. They were a most remarkable set of people, particularly two of them, Gour Govind Roy and Kanti Chunder Mitra. The present writer had the good fortune to be with both of them for some time in 1909, and he can say without hesitation that in his wide acquaintance with people of many nationalities and faiths, he has rarely come across men of their type. He can also add that he is not alone in thinking of them in this way and that whoever knew them well came to cherish towards them the same love and regard.

Both these men came early in contact with Keshub and became missionaries of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj. Of these, Gour Govind Roy was well-versed in the Hindu Shastras from the start, and he proved, therefore, very valuable in gathering together the best Theistic texts from the various great books of the Hindus for the collection called the *Sloka-Sangraha*.\* Later on he was entrusted with the

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\* This contained as has been mentioned already theistic texts from all the Scriptures of the world.



task of making a special study of the whole of Hinduism from the point of view of the New Dispensation, i.e. the Harmony of all the Religions. He stuck to this task for nearly forty years that he continued to live after that with a singleness of purpose and devotion to his duty, or rather to his mission, in a way which might well be emulated by even eminent scholars and writers. Upadhyaya Gour Govind Roy, as he was called, threw himself heart and soul into his work, and produced one work after another, all of which have been monuments of his vast learning and great industry. He literally churned the ocean of Hinduism, mighty as the task was, and as a result thereof he wrote his *Gita Samanvaya Bhashya* and *Vedant Samanvaya* in easy simple Sanskrit. Both these works are considered very important by those who know their worth, particularly the first which is considered to be almost as good a commentary on the *Gita* as the recognised standard ones. These big works were translated by himself into Bengali, in which he wrote, besides, a voluminous life of his master Keshub. In this he brought together all the materials concerning Keshub, and so far as historical facts are concerned, it is considered the most reliable of the many biographies of Keshub. In addition to these, he wrote one or two very valuable works on Vaishnavism, and a life of Krishna. He remained for a long period the editor of the *Dharma-tatwa*, the Bengali organ of the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj and the Nava Vidhan, and his articles, at least a selection from them, if ever published in the form of a book, would be a valuable addition to the literature of this body.

Although the special interest, study and work of Upadhyaya Gour Govind Roy was in the field of Hinduism, he did not lose the whole of the New Dispensation in a part thereof. He was ever open to truth from whatever source it might come, and manifested to the very last this spirit of discipleship, the same that had taken possession of Keshub all through his life. In this, perhaps, he was the one man among the immediate followers of Keshub who came nearest to him. Whether it be questions of Science or Philosophy or of Christology or Krishnology, all interested him very much, and he was ever ready to learn new truths. Here is one of the noblest examples of this openness to truth that came to the notice of the present writer. It was the intention of many of the missionaries of the Nava Vidhan to make that Church Keshub-centric, and the keeping of the Vedi empty in the Brahma Mandir was a step in that direction. Gour Govind, along with others, had much to do with this. It was their honest opinion that the Nava Vidhan could not but have Keshub for its centre. To this end they had worked after Keshub's passing away for nearly a quarter of a century. It was after this long period that the present writer, then a raw youth of about twenty-four, went to Calcutta in 1909 and stayed in the Prachar Ashram with Gour Babu and others for a few months. While there he had the privilege of having many talks with Gour Babu on the question of the centre of the New Dispensation, and he brought to the notice of Gour Babu what Keshub himself had said on the matter. This was not new to Gour Govind, and so all that he (the

writer of this) did was to urge the claims of Keshub's own words in the matter. After some of these talks, this old man of seventy-five who, besides, was one of the most learned men in the whole land and had already written all his great works, one evening while walking on the terrace of the Mission House in Calcutta, told him that what he had been saying to him on the Christocentre of the New Dispensation was true, and added that it was because they had neglected to follow Keshub in this that the condition of the Nava Vidhan was so low ever since Keshub had left them. This was a confession of his own error and at the same time a testimony to the Truth, and under the circumstances in which it was made *i.e.*, remembering the contrast in age, knowledge, experience and in other things between the two parties engaged in this conversation, it shows one of the noblest examples of humility and openness to truth in New Hindustan. He also acknowledged his own error as well as that of the Durbar in passing the resolution in regard to the keeping of the Vedi vacant, and added that although it was too late for them to mend matters, the Church might do so when they were gone.

Bhai Kanti Chunder Mitra also came to the Brahma Samaj early in life, and he served it to the end of his days. He was a *Sevak* of *Sevaks*, a servant of servants. The work of maintaining the families of the missionaries of the Samaj was entrusted to him since the seventies, and he carried it on for nearly fifty years. With no definite source of income whatever, he had to feed and clothe many families from day to day and year to year, and satisfy a large variety of people in various ways. All

this he did with such a trust in Providence and such patience and love for all as have been rarely witnessed in our times. He became father, mother and friend to all these families in the best sense of the term, and his love was so overflowing that even the whole community of the New Dispensation Church, nay, the entire Brahma Samaj came to look upon him in that light. *Kaka-Babu* as he was called was loved by all, children, young and old, men and women, and wherever real work was to be done and true service to be rendered, he was sure to be there. So great was his love and of such a peculiar quality that even men in high position and in ripe old age used to address him in their letters to him as "our beloved mother". This motherly nature of his was the fruit of the belief in the Motherhood of God which Keshub preached in his last days as a special feature of the New Dispensation, and perhaps it was in *Kaka-Babu* that it manifested itself at its best. When he passed away at the ripe age of about eighty in 1917, there was a universal outburst of grief from the whole of the Brahma Samaj, and everybody felt that he or she had lost one of the best of his or her friends.

Another name may be mentioned in connection with the activities of the Prachar Ashram, and it is that of *Bhai Girish Chunder Sen*. He was another missionary to whom was entrusted the task of studying Islam. He lived for more than thirty years after the mission of his life was thus defined, and during this period he translated almost all the most important works of Mohammedanism, works which number about forty. Among these are included the Koran, the Hadis, a very voluminous life of

Mohammed and several volumes of the lives of Moslem saints. He has rendered thus a very great service to the whole of Bengali literature. The large Moslem community of Bengal is particularly thankful to him for this service of his.

The Prachar-Ashram party did, in this way, a great deal of work in the field of literature. This was not all. These missionaries, by holding themselves together, were true to the ideal of a Church that Keshub had left as a legacy to them, and thereby they kept the community of the believers of the Nava Vidhan from falling to pieces as it would otherwise have done under the stress of so many splits and divisions. So noble was their example, besides, that several men came forward in the course of a generation to be ordained as missionaries of this Church, no small thing when it is remembered that the missionaries of the Nava Vidhan have no definite income and they have to live literally according to the precept "Take no thought for the morrow". In addition to all this, the party conducted two papers, one in English called the *World and the New Dispensation*,\* and the other in the vernacular called *Dharma-tattwa*.

During more than a quarter of a century that these men and others too were working in all these ways, new men were coming forward to take their place. The most important of these were Profs. Benoyendranath Sen and Mohit Chunder Sen, and Bhai Pramatha Lal Sen. All these were deeply influenced by Pratap, and they all were men of fine culture and high character. They

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\* This paper is now called the Nava Vidhan, the vernacular term for New Dispensation.

worked among young men of Calcutta, and their influence was widely felt. It was their aim to reorganize the Church of the New Dispensation as well as the Bharat-Varshiya Brahma Samaj, but unfortunately the first two of these died early. Pramatha Lal Sen, the remaining one of the three, was not only the most spiritual of this trio, but he is one of the finest characters in the Brahma Samaj. He is a nephew of Keshub, and perhaps he is the only man in the whole of Keshub's family who is most like his uncle spiritually. Like his elder brother Nand Lal Sen, whom we have already mentioned in connection with the Karachi Samaj, he has remained unmarried, and they had one more thing in common, namely, a sort of passivity of character. It is very likely that these two brothers, had they not been Keshub's nephews, would have been the foremost disciples of Ram Krishna Paramhansa, by whom also they were influenced to a certain extent. Except this likeness in one or two things, the two brothers had very little in common with each other. While the elder brother was one of the most self-centred of men, the younger is the very reverse of it. No man has been so saturated with the spirit of Keshub and therefore of all that is good and great in the world as Pramath Lal Sen. He is at his best in worship, and he lives habitually in the realm of prayer and devotion and study of great religious literature. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that he is the most spiritual man in the entire Brahma Samaj, and one of the most religious men in the country. He would be far more at home with the monks of some order devoted to prayer and worship in the Catholic Church of medieval ages than

he is with the twentieth century Brahmas. He has an enthusiastic admiration for the Oxford Movement and the greatest love and regard for Cardinal Newman. The Catholic Church is the ideal church to him in many ways. He believes in Jesus Christ at least in the same way as both Keshub and Pratap believed in Him. When Max Muller asked Pratap in 1900 to affiliate the New Dispensation Church to the Anglican Church, he was one of a small group of people who sympathized with the idea very much. When the present writer went to Calcutta in 1909, he was the one man who confirmed him in his Christo-centric views. And his attitude towards him (the writer of this) has been one of deep sympathy with his ideals throughout since that time.

This Pramatha Lal Sen, better known as Nalooda, gradually extended his influence over a number of young men, and prepared them by the noble example of his life and character for the work of putting the Nava Vidhan Church on a proper basis. All this silent and steady work culminated in the holding of a convention, called the Samgha, at Lucknow in 1914. By this time most of the old missionaries had passed away, and the few that remained were eager to draw together for the great cause they represented. All the parties were thus united together after a long time, and in consequence there came a new inspiration to the whole body. With this the old question about the centre of the Church came up once more. The two daughters of Keshub, Maharanees of Cuch Behar and Mourbhanja were also there, and they began from that time to take an active part in the affairs of the Church. It was natural for them to

make the Church Keshub-centric, and to this end efforts were made ever since the Samgha was held, or rather the Samgha itself was a step in that direction. To this there was hardly any serious protest from what may be called the purely Brahma standpoint, namely, that of rationalism which does not believe in any outward authority or centre, except from Braj Gopal Niyogi, one of the later missionaries who had served the cause well. The question of centre is an all-important one for all true religion, and although the other Brahma and Prarthana Samajes have not yet come to realize the full\* significance of the problem, this Church has come to feel more and more that without authority or centre there is no religion worth the name. It was perhaps owing to this that there was not much protest against Keshub-centre from the point of view of pure rationalism.

Another protest that was made against it was in favour of Christo-centre, and that was made by the present writer. It was not so much a protest as giving the solution of the problem in the only proper manner. He took his stand upon Keshub's own words in his last lecture "Asia's Message to Europe," upon Pratap's repeated utterances of the same kind, and finally upon what had been said to him by Upadhyaya Gour Govind Roy. These have been so far the only three leaders and thinkers of the New Dispensation, and their testimonies concur in this. The writer of this may also add that when he wrote his articles on this question in 1915,

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\* The question of centre is engaging, however, the attention of the most thoughtful in the Brahma Samaj.



he had a most encouraging letter from Pramatha Lal Sen. Apart from this, although all the members of the Church did not accept this view (rather some were positively against it and others were indifferent) it must be said that some of those who stood for Keshub-centre sympathized with the present writer. Somehow or other, the discussion thus raised did not result in anything substantial beyond bringing this very vital question to the front. Later on when the writer of this, going further in his spiritual development, accepted the orthodox Christian position, there was again a controversy in regard to this question of centre, and it must be said again to the credit of the Nava Vidhan Church that, though it did not make a definite pronouncement in favour of Christo-centre, it re-affirmed its fidelity to Christ Jesus in no uncertain terms, and said that it was prepared to be exiled from this land if Christ was exiled therefrom. No stronger proof of the true catholicity of this Church can be given than this, and the fact that in spite of the present writer's religious position, he has not lost a single friend of his in the New Dispensation Church. It still looks upon him as its own. He is also thankful to add that even his name was allowed to remain on the roll of its missionaries for years after he was baptized.

To-day this Church is working and even growing under the leadership of Pramatha Lal Sen and the two daughters of Keshub. Of the two sisters, the elder one, Maharani Suniti Devi of Cooch Behar, is more gifted, while the younger, Maharani Sucharoo Devi of Mourbhanja, is the most religious of Keshub's children. Both the sisters have gone through much sorrow, especially

the elder one, and it has had a chastening influence on them. Maharani Suniti Devi has quite recently made a princely gift of the Lily Cottage, Keshub's house together with the adjoining grounds,\* a gift worth some lacs of rupees for the cause of Woman's Education. Both these sisters are devoting themselves more and more to the work of the Nava Vidhan, thereby proving themselves worthy of the great name they inherit. Several young men are working in a variety of ways under these influences, and the cause is progressing, though so gradually as to be almost imperceptible. Among these younger people, Jamini Kanta Koar might be mentioned as one who has already a record of several years' service to the cause to his credit. Priyanath Mallic belongs to the older group, and is a devout and sincere man. His devotion to Keshub is unique, and his prayers have always a remarkable ring of their own. This Church is the richest of all in the Brahma Samaj in the number of men and women devoted to God, and it has comparatively a much larger number of young men devoted to its cause.

But the feeling can not be resisted that the Nava Vidhan has not yet found itself. The umbilical cord connecting it with the Brahma Samaj has not yet been cut, and the daughter is yet governed in many ways by the mother. The Nava Vidhan Church still continues to be only a section of the Brahma Samaj, and consciously or unconsciously all its members, without perhaps a single exception, feel and work as if this were the case. They consider their Church as having outgrown the Brahma

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\* This property was originally bought by Keshub for 20,000 Rs.

Samaj, and yet they consider themselves as parts of it. Owing to this dubious position of theirs, their attitude towards the old communities, towards the other sections of the Brahma Samaj and in regard to many other things, is halting and uncertain. The old Brahmic consciousness and leaven is still there, and thus what was meant to be fully national, even all-Asiatic and universal, remains but an eccentric part of a very small sect. The followers of Keshub have not yet grown to the stature which Keshub placed before them as their model, and they will compromise the character of the Nava Vidhan still more if they make Keshub the centre of their Church. May the spirit of Keshub himself prevent them from this, and may they grow in his proper spirit more and more ! Therein lies the only hope of this Church, and shall we not also say, of the entire Brahma Samaj ?

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## THE FUTURE

The Brahma Samaj has been celebrating its centenary during the last few months in various places and few things can show better the present position of the Samaj in the country. During the last five years two other bodies have celebrated their centenaries, the Arya Samaj and the Swami Narayan Sampradaya. Whereas both these bodies attracted to their celebrations men and women in tens of thousands, the Brama Samaj not only failed in evoking much enthusiasm in the entire body but it showed how torn it continues to be even to this day. There was a painful controversy between the New Dispensation Church and the Sadharan Brahma Samaj in regard to the date of the centenary to begin with, and the Nava Vidhan Samaj stood sullenly aside without taking any part in the celebration. This attitude on its part has been very unfortunate for the centenary and the whole cause, even the cause of Keshub, has suffered thereby. But apart from this there was not much enthusiasm for the celebration except in the Sadharan Brahma Samaj of Bengal or rather of Calcutta. The most redeeming feature of it, however, has been the presence in the country for months of some Unitarian leaders, both men and women, from England and America who have toured the country and inspired the various Samajes by their presence and lectures. From the way in which they have been doing this it would seem as if they were more enthusiastic about the centenary than the Brahmas themselves.

Such an inference, harsh as it may appear at first sight, is not far from true. There is a wide-spread feeling in the country, shared in by not a few Brahmas them-

selves, that the work of the Brahma Samaj is done and that there is no more chance of its attracting large numbers to itself. It is this feeling which is largely responsible for the decline of missionary enthusiasm in the Samaj. The facts regarding this are these as given by the late K. Rang Rao of Mangalore :\*

The Nava Vidhan Section, in the course of a period of twenty-eight years, from 1887 to April 1915, ordained fourteen missionaries, i.e. one missionary in every two years on an average. In the course of the last 12½ years, since April 1915, there has not been a single instance of ordination in the Navavidhan... The state of things in the Sadharan Brahma Samaj so far as their missionary order is concerned looks to be still worse. In the course of the last twelve or thirteen years, the number of missionaries, far from increasing, has come down to almost half. They have now only six ordained missionaries two of whom are above seventy, one nearing that age, and one is disabled by chronic illness.

To this the very pertinent fact may be added that during the course of the entire history of the Brama Samaj, practically all its missionaries with perhaps a solitary exception or two, came from the parent Samaj i.e. the Hindus. Thus the Brahma Samaj in itself has been barren of all missionary life and enthusiasm. All its leaders, great and small, and those who devoted themselves entirely to the cause of the Brahma Samaj, belonged by their birth and early breeding and nurture to the main body of the Hindus.

One of the main causes of this decline of missionary life and work and also of the membership of the Samaj in general is thus given by Ranga Rao:

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\* A paper read before the All-India Theistic Conference, 1928.

I for my part ascribe it mainly to our heedlessly giving an anti-Indian form to our religious life, without caring to consider why the alien Christian Missions are trying to Indianise Christ and Christianity in India.

There is a great deal of truth in this statement and the feeling can not be resisted that the Brahma Samaj, in spite of a century of its life and work, has failed to take root in the land and still continues to be an exotic plant. While the Brahma Samaj started as an imitation of Unitarian Christianity, much of it even to-day is a poor reflection of European Rationalism. To this intellectual bias has been added another which may well be called pharisaic and communal. We shall quote Ranga Rao again:

As a rule peace seems to prevail in the Prarthana Samajes and noise in the Brahma Samajes. There are no doubt a few Samajes notably in South India where there is neither peace nor noise owing to the awful paucity of membership. I ascribe the lack of progress and the existence of noise in Brahma Samajes mainly to the rule books. One Samaj that was so promising and had 55 members and sympathizers 15 years ago, now possesses scarcely one fourth of that number.....An esteemed member of the Samaj who has kept it from sinking by his tactfulness and goodness of heart wrote to me that their last annual meeting ended almost in a fiasco owing to the difficulty of getting initiated members to fill certain offices to which the uninitiated were disqualified under the rules. I called for a copy of this rule book and was surprised to see that Brahmas, while crying down the caste-system from their pulpit, create a new caste-system by their rule book within the Samaj. In the distribution of rights and privileges of membership, the initiated become Brahmins and the uninitiated Sudras.

As is inevitable, there has been bred a sort of superiority complex in the mind of an average Brahma which vitiates all his mental outlook. The following words of Bepin Chunder Pal which he addressed recently to Brahma young men are unfortunately true of a large part of the Brahma Samaj.

\* They should forget the adjective *Brahma* : brush aside your superiority complex, said he : self-consciousness makes one ugly.

Thus the Brahma Samaj which started its life as a religious movement has ended in becoming a secularized community, almost a caste in as much as the chief binding force between the members thereof is interdining and intermarriage. It forms a kind of backwater of religious and communal life separated largely by its own sense of self-satisfied superiority from the main currents of national life which flow past it with a power and rapidity which it can neither appreciate nor even understand. It is no wonder that the Brahma Samaj has ceased to count for much in the life of the nation and that it has still less of a future before it. Evidently it is a case of the first being the last. But this is not all. Were it so, there would be no necessity to write this book. The present impotence of the Brahma Samaj as an organization only brings out in stronger relief the power and potency of its spiritual ideals. These have gone out as a leaven that has leavened the lump of life of the whole of Hindustan. Inasmuch as the Brahma Samaj at its best represents the movement of the Hindu mind for something larger and deeper than what it had known in the past, and since

this movement is seen at its noblest in the Brahma Samaj, the future religious life of this country, whatever it be, will have to travel along the same road to a very large extent. Already the influence of the Brahma Samaj has been potent in giving form and shape to some of the religious movements that have since come into existence. Dayanand Saraswati wanted to work at first with the Brahma Samaj, and it was only when that was found impossible that he started the Arya Samaj. Vivekanand, the founder of the Ramkrishna-Vivekanand movement, received his early training in the Brahma Samaj. Agni-hotri, the founder of the Deva Samaj, was a missionary of the Brahma Samaj for many years. Brahma Bandhav Upadhyaya, one of the very few original thinkers and workers in the Christian Church among the Hindus, was inspired a great deal in his youth by the Brahma Samaj. While in all these cases and many more we could trace a direct influence, the indirect influence has been still greater and much more widespread. What we know as Liberal Hinduism owes not a little to the liberalizing tendencies of the Brahma Samaj. The same is true of Christianity also in the land. Thus even during the last half century the influence, both direct and indirect, of this Samaj or rather of its spiritual ideals, has been immense. But it has, by no means, been exhausted thereby. Rather its real influence has just begun, and the leaven will go on working till it leaveneth the whole lump. Not only this. This spiritual part of the Brahma Samaj has a ministry for the whole world and the mission of Ram Mohan and especially of Keshub will abide for a long long time.

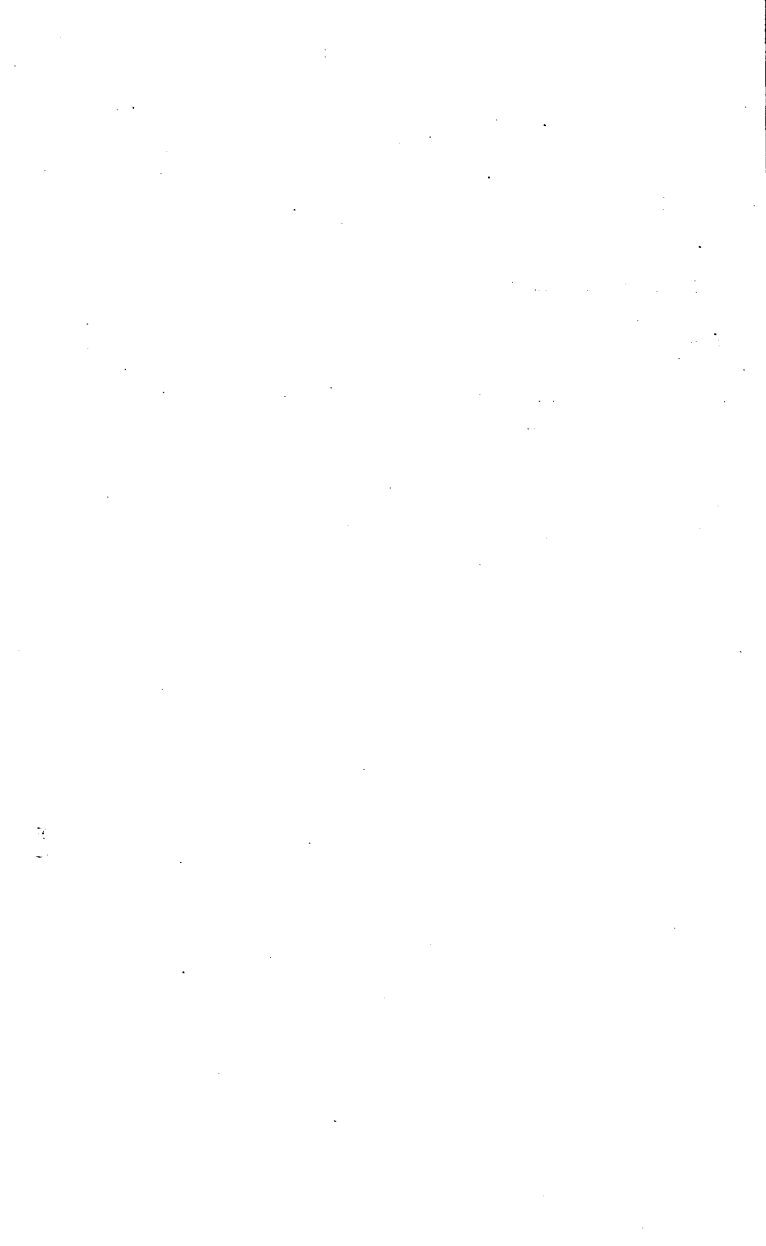


Thus even if the body of the Brahma Samaj were to vanish for ever, a fate which may God avert—the soul and spirit thereof will be enshrined for ever in the history and the heart of Hindustan. It has contributed already a great deal in the making of the New Hindustan. Its chief leaders, Ram Mohan, Devendra and Keshub are among the foremost of the makers of New Hindustan. Its many missionaries and servants lived and died for New Hindustan in the creation of which they contributed not a little. The saintly lives and the self-sacrificing services of men and women like Sadhu Aghore Nath, Gour Govind Roy and Kanti Chunder Mitra, Devi Aghore Kamini, Navalrai, Hiranand, Bholanath Sarabhai and Pramatha Lal Sen and many others have been a great asset not only to the Brahma Samaj but to the whole country. The same spirit is, besides, embodied in the large amount of literature produced by the Samaj during the course of a century, both in English and in the many vernaculars of the land, its studies in various Religions, its biographies and auto-biographies, its prayers and sermons and last but not least its devotional songs. Much of this literature is of a high order and very few modern religious movements have been able to do as much in this line. This is its gift to the country and it is indeed a great gift. But more than all this, the chief value of the Brahma Samaj lies in its affording to the country an example of a search after and practice of Truth as far as it saw, an example such as has not been seen on so large a scale in our times. Its has been the truest *Satyagraha* and its devotion to God and service of man have been comparatively much larger and nobler than that of any other body of people. In its palmy days, especially in

the time of Keshub Chunder Sen, choicest of men flocked to it from every Province, and they served it or rather through it the whole country faithfully and long. The record of these services would make a chapter of history of religious and social reform of which any nation may well be proud.

In and through all this and much more, the spirit of the Brahma Samaj will continue to call for ages more the people of this country to a life of high moral and spiritual adventure, to a deep and intense search after Truth, to a passionate love for God and self-sacrificing labours for Man. With still greater force and urgency it calls the Brahma Samaj to be its living expression, and we shall end this book with the hope and prayer that it may respond to this call and thereby take its proper and rightful place in the life of the nation.

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